

BBC
BOOKS

DOCTOR • WHO

The Doctor Trap

SIMON MESSINGHAM



Recent titles in the Doctor Who series:

WISHING WELL

Trevor Baxendale

THE PIRATE LOOP

Simon Guerrier

PEACEMAKER

James Swallow

MARTHA IN THE MIRROR

Justin Richards

SNOWGLOBE 7

Mike Tucker

THE MANY HANDS

Dale Smith

GHOSTS OF INDIA

Mark Morris

SHINING DARKNESS

Mark Michalowski

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

Published in 2008 by BBC Books, an imprint of Ebury Publishing.
Ebury Publishing is a

division of the Random House Group Ltd.

© Simon Messingham, 2008

Simon Messingham has asserted his right to be identified as the author
of this Work in

accordance with the Copyright, Design and Patents Act 1988.

Doctor Who is a BBC Wales production for BBC One Executive
Producers: Russell T

Davies and Julie Gardner Series Producer: Phil Collinson

Original series broadcast on BBC Television. Format © BBC 1963.
'Doctor Who',

'TARDIS' and the Doctor Who logo are trademarks of the British
Broadcasting Corporation

and are used under licence.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval

system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying,

recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

The Random House Group Ltd Reg. No. 954009.

Addresses for companies within the Random House Group can be found

at www.randomhouse.co.uk.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978 1 846 07558 0

The Random House Group Limited supports the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), the leading international forest certification organisation. All our titles that

are printed on Greenpeace approved FSC certified paper carry the FSC logo. Our paper

procurement policy can be found at www.rbooks.co.uk/environment

Series Consultant: Justin Richards

Project Editor: Steve Tribe

Cover design by Lee Binding © BBC 2008

Typeset in Albertina and Deviant Strain

Printed and bound in Germany by GGP Media GmbH

This book is dedicated, with love,

to Ralph Scott and Oscar Daniel

and their terrific Mum.

You will be told: Planet 1 is real.

Planet 1 is real just as any other planet is real: an actual

world orbiting an actual sun in an actual bona fide solar system.

Planet 1. The planet where technology got so advanced its ruler is in every material sense all-powerful. The planet where the very molecules of the air can be sculpted into whatever you desire. Oh, it's real, all right. You will be told.

However, should you ask where, should you demand specific coordinates, you will be told Planet 1 is, well, it's in the spatial wastes ... past the Outer Rim ... at the back of beyond ... Oh, look, it's just ... *out there!* And that's all you'll get.

In fact, so hard to find is Planet 1 that many civilisations have gone full circle and now consider the whole planet a myth. Life in the galaxy is hard and such myths are generated easily. Planet 1 is simply too good to be true. People want it to be true, so they believe it is true, which unfortunately does not make it actually true.

Therefore, you will be told: Planet 1 is not real.

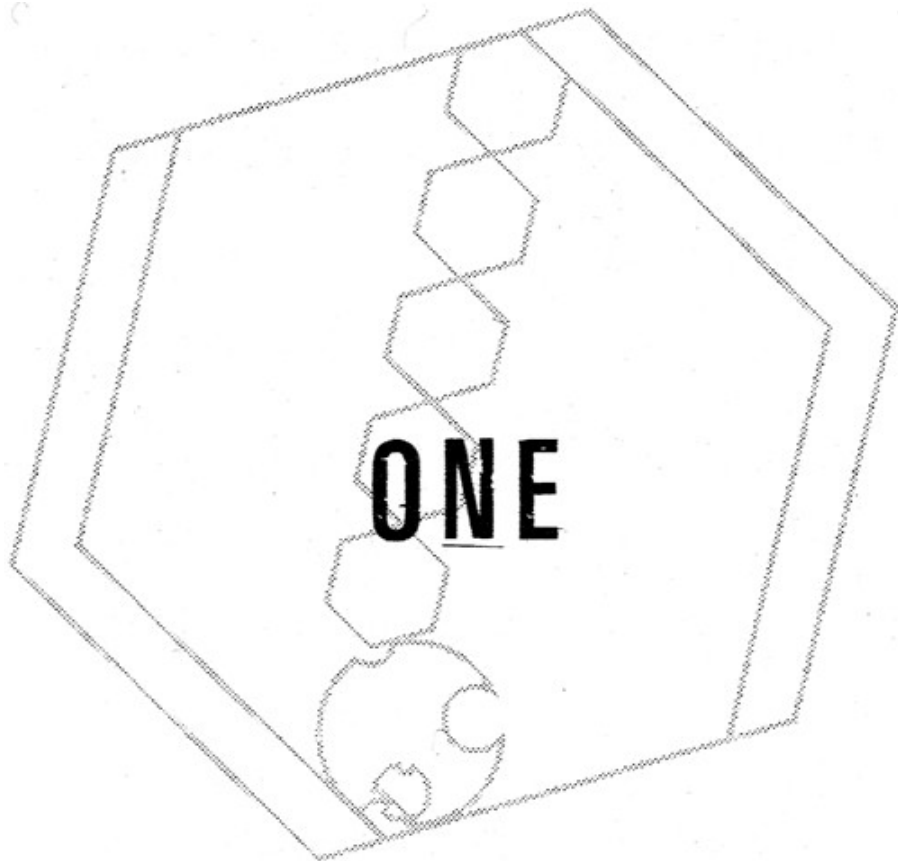
Sebastiene would not have it any other way.

Sebastiene is a collector. He is also a charmer, a thief, your best friend, a Level 20 Rogue, the most beautiful creature you have ever seen, a player of games, a man you would lay down your life for, and a murderer.

Over the centuries, an unnaturally long time if you stop to think about it for one who seems so young, Sebastiene has ruled Planet 1. He has everything a sentient creature might possibly desire but he wants more. Not gold or treasure or any currency. He does not need money. Why would Sebastiene want money?

Now, any planet rumoured to groan with the most powerful technology ever amassed is going to be attractive to a certain type of individual. The type who would prefer Sebastiene to step down; to make way. And now we see what Sebastiene craves instead of money. He wants you to come and find him. If you covet what is his, if you can find the place, Planet 1 is there. All you have to do is take it from him.

If rumours are to be believed, there are those who have found Planet 1. Unfortunately, rumours are all you get, for despite the hundreds who have made this claim and headed into space, none has ever returned. Perhaps they perished in the wastes of deep space, perhaps they did not. And you never know, perhaps they found Sebastiene. Then again, just occasionally, some are invited.



‘The good news: Earth,’ said the Doctor.

Donna winced as the klaxon started up again. The TARDIS rang with the sound. A tooth-drilling, eardrum-shattering siren guaranteed to send the listener clinically insane after ten seconds. She gripped the console to stop the sound sweeping her away. ‘And?’ she growled. The Doctor beamed a great big smile. ‘That’s a distress signal! We get to help, again.’ He pulled on a great woolly coat. ‘It’s weird. Your lot shouldn’t be able to send a distress signal like that. Not in this time frame. Not this

kind of distress signal.'

'What kind of distress signal?'

'The loud annoying distress signal.' He consulted a reading on the TARDIS console, whistling as if he couldn't hear a thing.

Donna nodded. 'Turn it off!'

The Doctor frowned. 'What did you say?'

'Turn. It. Off!'

'Eh?'

Donna bared her teeth. 'I said: Turn—'

'Hold on. I'll turn it off.' He stabbed a button and the noise stopped. 'What did you say?'

The console room startled Donna with its sudden silence. She shouted anyway. 'Doctor! I'll kill you!'

'What? What did I do?' He stood half and half out of his bulky coat, a picture of bruised innocence.

Donna thumped the door controls and stormed out. The Doctor listened. There was an expectant pause. The Doctor tried to hide his smile as he heard Donna scream.

'Oh yeah,' he shouted. 'The bad news: Antarctica.'

'Snow!' said Donna. 'You did this to me on that Ood planet. We've done snow. What is it you've got against tropical? My nose is turning red.'

The Doctor bounded over the snow. 'Donna, your nose

turns red at the drop of a cat. Going red is your nose's first and greatest talent.'

'Some people would tire of being so rude. They would run out of steam, get bored, but don't you give in to them. You crack on.'

He seemed fascinated by the snow. 'They say the Inuit have fifty words for this.'

'I've got a few myself,' Donna muttered. Then she saw it. She scrabbled over a drift and there it was. Down a gentle snowy slope about a mile ahead: a vast ice sheet spread out to the horizon like a gigantic skating rink. Two tracked vehicles were parked over a particularly dark patch of ice. Men, nothing but smudges in the distance, stood in a ring, their arms outstretched. They had planted flags, marking the boundaries of the dark patch.

'What is that?' asked Donna. 'That's a buried spaceship, isn't it?'

'They found something,' said the Doctor. 'Under the ice.'

Excited, he put one hand over his mouth and pointed with the other. White powder puffed up around him as he stamped his feet with excitement. 'Look. Snow-Cats. Tracked vehicles. Oh, brilliant. I love Snow-Cats.'

'You love everything. So it's a mission to dig up a

crashed flying saucer.'

'I love missions to dig up a crashed flying saucer!'

'I thought you might.'

The Doctor jumped up and down. 'Let's get involved.'

The TARDIS waited, as it had waited so many times before. It hummed to itself, feeling the cold Antarctic snow dropping and settling onto its casing. The TARDIS was very good at waiting.

This time, however, it didn't wait as long as it might have expected. About ten metres from the front door, the dropping snow suddenly shot apart in all directions, leaving a man-shaped hole in the air. A figure filled that hole, and it was a figure the TARDIS would have recognised: handsome angular face, dark friendly eyes, straight hair.

The man shivered in his shabby suit. He danced up and down to pump warmth into his plimsolled feet.

He watched the Doctor and Donna trudging through drifts towards the doomed expedition. Smiling, he thought of what waited for them there. Bit scary, if truth be told.

Next, he held up a large metal key and kissed it. He was ever so excited. 'The TARDIS! I can't believe it!' He punched air then clamped a hand over his mouth to muffle his giggles. He cast wild glances towards the Doctor and

Donna to check they weren't looking back.

He held up the key. 'Moment of truth,' he told it.

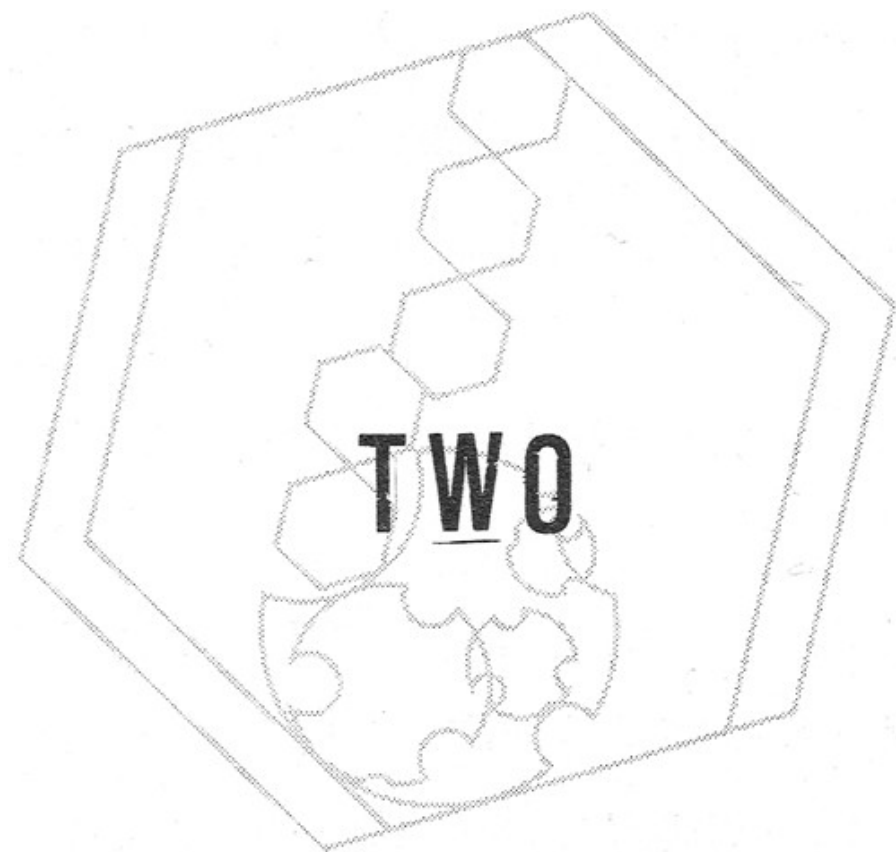
The man walked to the TARDIS, unlocked the door and stepped inside.

The door closed.

Despite the howl of the polar wind, the voice was still just about audible from outside. It was the voice of the happiest man on the planet.

'Oh. My. God. I'm actually standing in the console room. Yes!'

Sixty seconds later, the TARDIS disappeared.



Sebastiene had long resigned himself to the fact that, in all modesty, he was the most insanely beautiful man in the universe. His present face was made up of superlatives: the bluest eyes, the finest golden head of hair and the whitest of sharp teeth. He had a perfectly central aquiline nose and full lips. His body was toned to perfection with sword practice and he had added a small duelling scar on his right cheek, but that was just for show. He glanced in the mirror once more to make sure, and to prepare the right expression to greet his guests.

‘Damn me if I don’t look fine today,’ he announced to his reflection. He snapped his fingers. The doors of his chamber flew open and in rushed Sebastiene’s dressing retinue: six wigged and powdered robots all designed to fit their master into various specific articles of clothing. His personal Butler robot followed close behind.

The Butler was a big chap. At three metres tall, he was a really big chap. Sebastiene designed all his high-ranking servants big. An ironic metaphor about life and power or something, he was certain.

Sebastiene currently had a fondness for the design of noble European houses of eighteenth-century Earth. He liked the dashing uniforms with their tight decorated military blouses, dangling swords and spurs. He liked the

long black moustaches and so made all his servants grow them. He had even remodelled his home to resemble a romantic Ruritanian castle – on a size and scale that could never have existed on Earth, but in his sensibility bigger was definitely, and always, better.

Sebastiene examined today's uniform. Scarlet tunic, tight cherry-picker trousers, long gleaming boots, gold inlaid sword belt. 'The best yet,' he said to his Butler. 'Most fitting for a special day like today. My compliments to the tailor.'

'Thank you, sir,' came the reply.

'Now, let me gaze at my realm.' Sebastiene jumped over the huge four-poster bed and thumped against the window.

Down in his immense cobbled courtyard, his servants – his robots in their silk colour-coded liveries – prepared the horse-drawn coaches for the hunters. He was ready.

A molecular air-screen shimmered. A picture formed in the air. His Supervisor robot, speaking from the control room deep in the Chateau's heart. The Supervisor bowed. This robot was another biggie like the Butler but rather more soberly dressed. Sebastiene liked to see his command staff in functional Napoleonic blue, with chunky gold buttons and huge tricorne hats. Gave the place

an efficient military feel.

‘Speak, Supervisor,’ said Sebastiene.

‘My master. The starships are dropping from orbit and requesting permission to land. Except Commissar Weimark, who is *demanding* permission.’

‘Open the force fields,’ said Sebastiene. ‘Let the hunters descend.’

There was a whoosh of inrushing molecules and the air-screen closed.

The Chateau, Sebastiene’s home on Planet 1, was suitably over the top. The architecture may have originated in eighteenth-century Europe, but the sheer scale would have been beyond the richest of its kings.

Sebastiene’s palace stretched from horizon to horizon, far too overwhelming for the human mind to take in. The intricate chiselling of the stone ramparts, the rich colours of the stained glass, the carvings on the hanging wooden eaves, might have been pleasing on their own but piled together they just made you feel sick. Not that Sebastiene cared. He could never go too fancy.

However, the WOW factor was the view from the air.

Sebastiene’s face, gigantic, staring right at you as your shuttle dropped straight into his mouth. The Chateau had been constructed in the image of its master. Like

Sebastiene himself, the castle was big, beautiful and absolutely crazy. Awe-inspiring was the idea. He was big on awe, and so far Sebastiene had never been disappointed.

The twelve shuttles touched down in a clearing in the Chateau gardens. Their occupants were ferried by ornate horse-drawn carriages past the stone gates and into Sebastiene's courtyard. The carriages contained, without the knowledge of those within, sophisticated sensor devices which secretly and thoroughly scanned their body chemistry, DNA and electro-kinetic auras.

Sebastiene had arranged for the morning to be misty, to set off the Chateau's landscaped gardens. Fir tree forests pierced cloud in the far mountains.

The horses pulled up at marble steps leading to gigantic jewel-studded oak doors. The hunters emerged warily, sizing up the Palace. Sebastiene sensed their tension, almost smelled it. Like them he thrived on heightened sensations; the rising of the hairs on the back of the neck. He lived for it.

Time to greet his guests. He didn't need to check the list; he knew them all well enough. Wondering whether any would be stupid enough to try and kill him, Sebastiene strode magnificently into the state room.

To construct the exact conference table he wanted, Sebastiene had grown and then destroyed a rainforest of mahogany. The grain of the wood had to be perfect, a demand which on average used up forty tree trunks per centimetre of table. The process resulted in tremendous environmental waste. No matter, the effect was magnificent. The table gleamed in the sunlight, which Sebastiene had arranged to shine through the jewelled windows at a forty-degree angle.

The hunters sat around the table, all twelve feeling clumsy and uncomfortable; already in a foul mood, which Sebastiene drank in as he entered.

‘My friends!’ he yelled, waving his silk handkerchief.

‘Welcome to Planet 1!’

He studied their faces. The awe was satisfactory. ‘Yes,’ he continued. ‘I am Sebastiene.’ He took a bow.

One end of the vast room shimmered and the air molecules solidified to define a screen and a picture: him taking his seat. Crossing elegant legs, Sebastiene snapped his fingers and the screen disappeared.

‘The Endangered Dangerous Species Society,’ he said.

‘All gathered together on my little planet. Esteemed members, I am honoured.’

A babble of argument erupted from the assembled

company. Sebastiene raised his hand to silence them. ‘No, no, my friends. No need to pretend; not here. Your identities are a secret; you have my word. Don’t ask me how I came by your membership list; I just did.’

The hunters sniffed, waiting for the catch, the trap. But all knew better than to try anything now.

‘The Society for Endangered Dangerous Species. Does what it says on the tin. Except that tin doesn’t say that you’re the ones who make them endangered.’

They were hooked. Of course they were or they would never have come. The hunters were a diverse bunch – humans, ab-humans, un-humans and a giant insect.

‘Membership is simple: you must provide a trophy. Evidence of a kill. Head, horns or Welsh, it doesn’t matter. The species must be endangered and dangerous to human life. Not politically correct but awfully fun. I believe the Endangered Dangerous Species Society is responsible for the elimination of over three hundred rare breeds, as well as being on the wanted list of every security force in the civilised galaxy.’ Sebastiene laughed. ‘I’m so excited! Aren’t you?’

At last, one of the hunters overcame the awe and stood up. He had a grey, bloodless face with hooded purple eyes. The man was incredibly thin, over two metres tall and

dressed in a long leather coat. ‘Sebastiene,’ he said in an emotionless voice. ‘What is this Society of which you speak? I do not have time to indulge fantasy. Your flippancy is ...’ he searched for the word, ‘irresponsible.’

‘Commissar Weimark.’ Sebastiene looked at the grey face. ‘The Cleanser of Beriagrad. If memory serves, your ticket into the club was the antlers of an Irradiate Grinderstag. A species now extinct, thanks to you.’

If the Commissar was shocked, he managed not to show it. He was too good for that. ‘I will have no part of this childish game.’

‘Oh, it’s a game, Commissar,’ said Sebastiene, ‘but there’s nothing childish about it. Don’t make that mistake.’

He stared unblinking at Weimark. ‘Now, sit down.’

A chill seemed to run through the room. Weimark sat. A single bead of perspiration ran down his slack face. He turned away.

‘Enough!’ bellowed Brutus – the augmented Simian.

He thumped the table with impressive force, splintering the perfect wood. ‘If such a Society did exist, which it doesn’t, why would you be interested? As you know so much about us, you know there can only be twelve members.’ He looked around at his colleagues and bared his yellow teeth in a gorilla smile. ‘The only twelve

members there have ever been. What animal is left for us to hunt? We have taken them all!’ He laughed and plonked himself back onto his seat.

Sebastiene smiled his smile, the one he used to charm galactic emperors and rich widows alike. Inwardly, he was marvelling at the Simian’s sheer stupidity. It wasn’t every day one came across stupidity like that. Quite touching really.

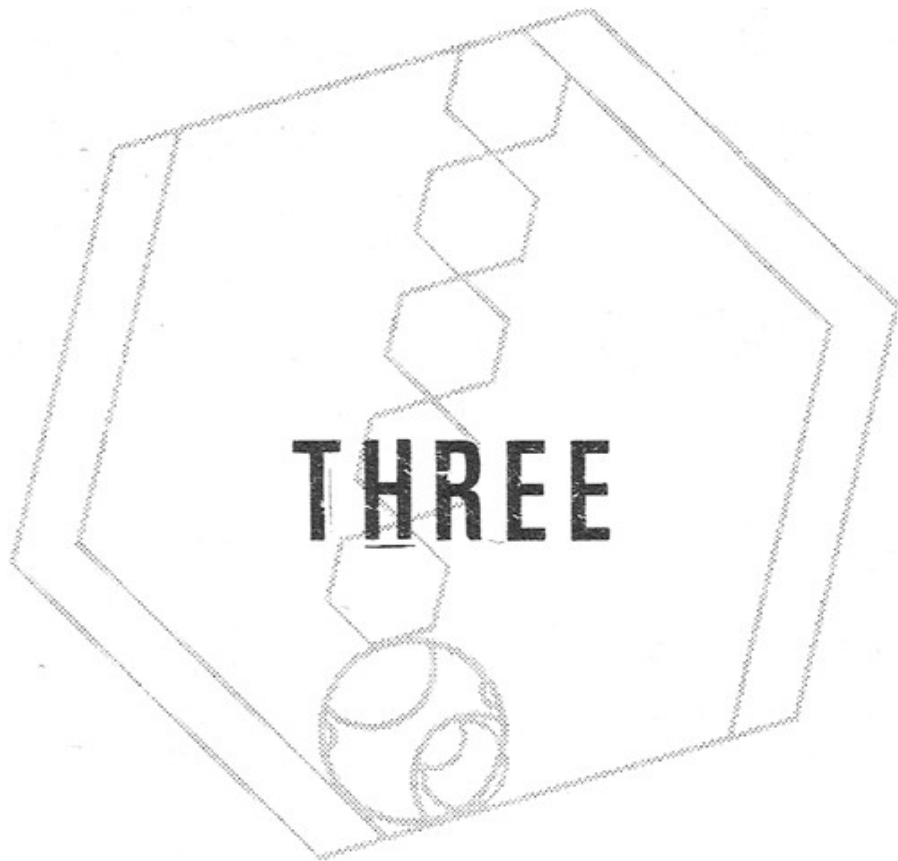
Sebastiene put his spurred feet on the jewelled table. ‘I have a trophy for you. The ultimate trophy. You won’t get better than him. I think you’ll find it worth your while.’

He waved a hand and a molecular screen flashed up a 3-D portrait of a smiling, intense young humanoid male.

A third hunter, or rather huntress, hooded and anonymous in her Carpalian veils, raised a long-nailed finger and pointed to the floating portrait. ‘I know that face. Who?’

‘He, my friends, is my trophy. He is the most dangerous life form in the universe. The last Time Lord. You all know him, in one form or another, as the Doctor.’

Sebastiene looked around the table at the Endangered Dangerous Species Society. ‘I think we’re in for one hell of a safari.’



Six men were cramming equipment into their cramped Snow-Cats. One man filmed the others with a camcorder. The triangular flags blew horizontal in the wicked Antarctic wind. The cameraman lowered the camcorder and dropped his furry parka hood to look in disbelief at the approaching strangers. His beard was lined with frost. ‘Who the hell are you?’ The man’s voice floated away in the cruel icy wind, as Donna and the Doctor reached him. ‘How did you get here?’ Donna pulled her coat collar up round her frozen face. The Doctor flashed a black wallet. ‘We’re the rescue team.

You know, for the distress signal.'

The man nodded. Donna realised he hadn't heard a word but the psychic paper had done its usual trick. Now the other men stopped to look at the new arrivals.

'I'm Dan Petroullis,' said the cameraman. 'Snowcap Geologist. I detected the sub-strata energy field that alerted us to the find.'

Donna shrugged. 'Good for you, Dan.'

'You just missed Colonel Barclay! He's already gone back to Snowcap!' Dan Petroullis pointed a thick gloved hand off somewhere to the horizon. 'He wanted to have a go at the specimen as soon as he could.'

'Snowcap?' asked Donna.

'Antarctic Space Tracking station. Must be 1986, or is that the year 2000? Specimen? What do you mean, specimen?' The Doctor looked at Donna. His eyes were wide. 'Oh dear,' he said.

She looked back at him. 'What?'

Petroullis poked the Doctor's shoulder. 'You know; the animal in the ice block. We dug it out twelve hours ago. It's OK,' he said. 'As soon as they get it into the lab, they're gonna start the thermal melt.'

'Right,' said the Doctor.

Petroullis smiled through his icy beard. 'Some find,

huh? Scientific discovery of the century. Soon get whatever's in there thawed out.' He gave the Doctor a thumbs-up and kept grinning. 'Can't wait to see what it looks like.'

'I think we'd better get to your base as soon as is humanly possible,' said the Doctor.

The Doctor's impish face looked down from the air-screen. He smirked as if taunting the hunters, daring them on.

The voices were a burble of noise but they all said the same thing.

'Did he say the Doctor?'

'Look, he's not *real*...'

'Do me a favour...'

'Oh come on,' Sebastiene interrupted. 'Surely somebody wants a pop. I offer you the finest trophy in the universe and you babble like frightened children.'

Now there was silence. The hunters looked at him. Yes, Sebastiene realised, they were afraid.

At last, one found the courage to speak. Inevitably, it was Commissar Weimark. 'Sebastiene,' he said, 'this is folly. The Doctor is a myth...'

'Let me assure you, the Doctor is very real. Oh he was quiet for a while, the flame of his memory fanned only by

obscure cults, but now the universe rings once more with his deeds. Every child in the galaxy has heard of the Doctor.'

Sebastiene stood. He walked round the perfect table. This was the sell. 'Should you succeed, you will succeed where hundreds, thousands of others have failed. The Endangered Dangerous Species Society will live in eternity.'

'And if we fail?' rasped a metallic voice. The Semblance of Draxyx, speaking from its armoured carapace.

'If you fail then I get to hunt you,' Sebastiene replied.

'Come on, there are twelve of you. Surely someone can bag him. Fair game?'

He blinked, and the air-screen changed picture to a digital map: areas divided by fizzing blue lines. 'Hunting Zones, one for each of you, tailored to your individual chosen environments. You just have to wait. The Doctor will land at random in one of your zones. From then it's up to you. Should a hunter miss and survive, Planet 1 will transmat the Doctor to another random zone and we start again. If the Doctor is killed, I will return the remaining hunters to your home planets, with considerable compensation for your time and effort, of course.'

Brutus let out a bellow of such raw rage that the whole room was silenced. Even Sebastiene was surprised. The Simian hurled his chair away and beat his chest. 'Enough! I will have no part of this madness. The Doctor cannot be vanquished by mortal hand. This is written in our holiest book. I will leave now.' He pointed a giant gloved fist at Sebastiene. 'Do not try to stop me, powdered fop.'

'Wouldn't dream of it,' said Sebastiene.

Brutus stomped to the back of the conference room.

Gilt-framed double doors opened as he approached.

Determined to have the last word, the Simian turned and sneered at his fellow hunters. "The Doctor? He will kill you all—"

Sebastiene pointed. A lance of bright light flashed from his hand and with a loud pop incinerated Brutus. The soft sunlight caught the ashes drifting to the floor.

'Impressive,' said the Carpalian Witch. 'But you did say you wouldn't dream of stopping him.'

'Oops.' Sebastiene looked coolly at his hand. 'Anyone else bursting to go?'

No one was.

They reached Snowcap Base three hours later. A low red sun was hanging in the air, threatening to drop under the horizon. At the Doctor's urging, the Snow-Cats had

charged crazily and dangerously over the snow. Donna's head was sore from the rattling and banging as the tracked vehicle bumped over the uneven terrain. The four scientists inside were hot in their parkas, and irritated at having their unique scientific find hijacked by a madman.

‘What were you thinking?’ the Doctor whined. ‘You don’t just thaw aliens out of ice blocks!’

‘Why not?’ asked a scientist. ‘It’s been frozen for twenty thousand years.’

‘That makes it worse!’

‘How do you know it’s an alien, anyway?’ asked another.

‘What’s it gonna do?’ asked the third.

The Snow-Cat lurched and they all tumbled forward.

‘What’s that noise?’ asked the driver.

Snowcap Base didn’t seem much to Donna. Just some chimneys sticking out of the snowy ground and a couple of sheds, although the Doctor insisted it would look a lot better underground.

Men were screaming. Donna could hear the sound as she emerged from the Snow-Cat.

Gunfire and panic seeped out of the chimneys.

She saw a crude rope and plank gangway leading past the chimneys to what looked like a closed submarine

hatch. The Doctor and the team shuffled along the gangway's wooden boards as the wind whipped snow around them.

'Security squad to laboratory area immediately!' a frightened electronic voice wafted up. 'Immediately! The specimen has broken loose! Repeat: it's loose!' And then Donna heard a roar, a sound so awful and alien she didn't need the Antarctic to freeze her blood.

The Doctor looked at Donna. She saw the excitement in his eyes. He leaped to open the hatch but she caught his arm. 'No,' she snapped. 'Don't.' She looked round for help but Petroullis and his chums were just standing in the snow, stunned.

The Doctor freed his arm. 'I've got to. You can't let an expedition full of people this dumb try and sort things out on their own.'

At last, a shifty human raised his hand. 'I say,' he spoke in a nasal English tone. His buck teeth protruded beneath a sweaty moustache.

'You may speak, Lord Percy,' said Sebastiene. 'And in case you think I might be fooled by your oh-so English dithering, I might remind everyone that you are the man responsible for bagging the last of the Stellar Raptors. So I won't take the trouble to be. Fooled, that is. Please,

proceed.'

Flustered by such a candid description of his character, Lord Percy spluttered. 'How are we supposed to find the Doctor? I mean, how are we supposed to track down a boulder who can travel anywhere in time and space? Assuming that he's really real, if you see what I mean.' 'You don't. I have already found him for you. All you have to do is catch him.'

Weimark sneered. 'How will you bring him here? Even the mighty Sebastiene couldn't—'

'He will be here, Commissar. The Doctor has a weakness. He, unlike you, cares about people. And please, never tell me what I can and can't do.'

'Proof would be nice,' said the Carpalian Witch. 'Not necessary. Just nice.'

'Oh well.' Sebastiene stifled a yawn. 'If you insist.' He clicked his gloved fingers.

An awful noise rang round the conference room. A noise like a barrel organ with emphysema. For those hunters who knew, terror crawled up their faces.

An object faded into the room: a battered blue box with a light on its roof. Before the hunters could react, a door in the box opened and a man leaped out.

'Ta da!' The Doctor winked. 'All right?'

The Doctor and Donna ran through the freezing tunnels.

Snowcap's emergency lights were flashing intermittently and there was a strong smell of smoke. Gunfire kept going off somewhere in the maze. More gunfire, then an alien roar, then the gunfire stopped.

'There's something wrong, Donna,' said the Doctor.

'You're not kidding.' She was out of breath.

Underground, Snowcap was hotter than hell. 'That thing's killing everybody.'

The Doctor paused in his run. 'I mean: the distress signal.'

'Forget that! They're dying down here.'

The roar came again and Donna tried not to fall to her knees in terror. 'We've got to help them.'

An explosion boomed ahead. The Doctor sniffed. 'That sounds like a laboratory blowing up.'

'How can you tell?'

'The smell.'

A figure ran at them out of the gloom. A man, a very frightened man in a green uniform caked in slime and blood. He didn't even see the Doctor and Donna until they grabbed his arms. 'Bullets won't stop it!' He struggled, his eyes panicked and unfocused. 'We're all going to die!'

'Mate!' Donna yelled. 'Where are the others?'

The man still didn't see her. He seemed to answer a completely different question. 'It's out. Growing... the scientists said... growing. It just sucked them in...'

'Where's the Colonel?' asked the Doctor. The man only shivered so the Doctor shook him. 'Come on, soldier! Where's your commanding officer?'

The soldier shook his head. 'When the alarm was raised, the Colonel took a squad into the labs. They never came out. I think it grows every time it takes one. We have to leave. We have to leave now!'

And with those words he shook himself free. He ran for the hatch, and that was the last Donna saw of him.

Something big, loud and hungry lurched into the corridor.

'OK, run,' said the Doctor and Donna did.

Two hours later, the Doctor went missing. He had gone into the lab on his own and she hadn't seen him since.

Now Donna ran with the rest of the survivors. As she ran, she caught the occasional glimpse of the creature they had released: a tentacled nightmare that wrapped men up and stung the life out of them before sucking them into itself.

Bullets made no mark, just glopped into its green fleshy skin. Of the Doctor, she could find nothing. If he was supposed to be sorting the situation, he wasn't doing a

very good job.

The lights were destroyed. So was the heating. In the ruins of an old control room, with the last of the survivors sealing up the doors for a hopeless last stand, Donna felt the temperature drop with a purpose. Her breath steamed out. The monster had destroyed the emergency generator. Now, if it didn't kill them, the Antarctic weather would. She heard a shout.

'Donna!'

The Doctor? Where?

The creature slammed against the barricade. White-faced men held fast, yelling out as they soaked up the blows. The metal door bulged like soap.

'Doctor?' Donna looked around the ruined room, stuck for a way out. 'Where are you when I need you?'

'Down here!'

She looked and saw him waggle his fingers at her. He was lying under a metal grille in an air duct in the torn floor.

'Doctor!'

The Doctor grinned. 'That's me.'

She sighed with relief. Of course. He had a plan. He always did. She squatted and yanked the grille open.

Behind her, the door crunched open an inch. A squelchy

tentacle squeezed into the gap. The screaming and firing began again.

‘Let’s get out of here,’ said the Doctor, eyeing the fracas. ‘Get in.’

Relieved, Donna lowered herself. ‘Wait a minute,’ she said.

The Doctor had already inched along the duct. ‘We don’t have a minute,’ came his muffled voice.

‘What about the Snowcap people? That thing’s gonna get all of them.’

He shook his head and shrugged. ‘Yeah, I know. We did everything we could.’

‘That can’t be right.’ She looked at the Doctor. ‘This ain’t Pompeii. We don’t just leave them. There isn’t some “we can’t muck about with history” thing.’

He appeared to consider her words. ‘You’re right. Hold on. I’ve got this machine that has the measure of the monster. I’ll give it to you.’

She heard the sound of metal being torn apart. ‘Help! Help us!’ yelled a desperate voice.

‘What machine?’ she asked. ‘We have to hurry!’

The Doctor was as irritatingly cool as ever. ‘A sonic field generator. Lure the monster in and bam, trapped in a sound field. Got it right here; in my hand.’

Donna thought for a second. 'Sounds good. What do you want me to do?'

'Just grab it and press the button.'

The Doctor wriggled, eventually pushing her way what looked to Donna like a small bracelet. 'That should sort everything out.'

Donna smiled. 'I knew you could do it. You always do.'

He looked coy. 'Yeah...'

Donna grabbed the bracelet off him, pressed the button, and everything in her world went dark.

The Society for Endangered Dangerous Species lost its head. As one, the members panicked. Some were already fleeing for the exit.

Sebastiene smiled. 'Settle down,' he said. 'Settle down and I'll tell you all about it.'

Had any hunters in the room remained level-headed enough to realise, they would have noticed something odd about this Doctor standing in front of them. He was as handsome as they had heard. He watched them with his famous casual curiosity with the eyes that never missed a thing. That was all to be expected.

What the more informed hunters might have spotted was that despite these obvious character traits, there was

something rather insubstantial about this Doctor. Where was the enthusiasm? Where was the love of life? ‘He’s not the Doctor,’ said Sebastiene, making it obvious.

‘Aww, you’ve ruined it. OK, I’m not the real Doctor,’ said the Doctor.

‘His name is Baris and he’s the Doctor’s number one fan.’

The Doctor nodded in confirmation. ‘My name is Baris and I’m the Doctor’s number one fan.’

The Society members returned to the table and reached for the refreshments. Fright made them thirsty.

‘I found this one on Proxima,’ said Sebastiene. ‘Baris has spent most of his life devoted to the Doctor and his travels, plugged into the Neural Net with a skull-dock, linked up with other like-minded fanatics, trawling through the galaxy for news of his presence. They’re everywhere and so many. However, even among the Doctor’s enthusiasts, Baris is numero uno.’

The Doctor, or at least the man who looked like the Doctor, nodded. ‘Who wouldn’t want to be the Doctor?’ he said. ‘Especially when you looked like me.’

Sebastiene smiled indulgently. ‘Yes Baris. Don’t speak now, not when I’m explaining. Be a good boy and sit.’

Baris turned white and obeyed. 'Sorry.'

The hunters noticed. Sebastiene had wanted them to.

He started again.

'Lots of civilisations can create doubles. Any old Tom, Dick or Harry with a spare robot or plastic surgeon seems to be able to knock out a Doctor replica. I fancy Planet 1's surgical techniques go a little bit further. I can duplicate any life form exactly, including DNA. Finding someone to put up with the pain is the hard bit.'

Baris thumped the right side of his chest. 'It wasn't fun having that second heart fitted, I can tell you.'

Sebastiene shrugged. 'Well, it wasn't fun for you.' He smiled his lovely smile at the memory. 'Stand up.'

Baris obeyed instantly. A small robotic probe flew into the room. It looked like a flying metal pen. A light flicked on at its tip and played over Baris's body. On the air-screen, the hunters watched the scan proceed. 'A perfect match,' said Sebastiene.

Commissar Weimark pointed at Baris. 'What is this foolishness? Why would you need such an exact duplicate?'

'Show them,' said Sebastiene.

Baris held up a key. 'This is the key to his TARDIS.

Rumour has it that none can use the key unless he lets

them. Until now.'

'And where did you get the key?'

'Never you mind. If he wants his TARDIS back, he's going to have to come to Planet 1 and get it. Luckily, we've left a handy transmat open for him to use.'

Lord Percy raised a hesitant arm. 'I say...' he stammered. 'Call me suspicious, but who's to say this is the real... whatdyacallit TARDIS machine thingummy? Who's to say we'll be chasing the real Doctor? I mean, you could just be having us on, couldn't you?'

Sebastiene looked almost impressed. 'Good point, Lord Percy. Well, for a start, the TARDIS is dimensionally transcendental. Go and have a look, I don't mind.'

Baris couldn't help himself. 'And that is technology only the Time Lords ever mastered.' He seemed terribly pleased by this, like he had made a point.

'Although Planet 1 is working on that technology,' said Sebastiene and gave Baris a look that made it clear he had said the wrong thing again. 'Now we have the TARDIS it won't take us long. Oh and there's something else.'

The Doctor's air-screen portraits were replaced by a new image. A dark room: very plain. Inside the room, a red-haired woman lay asleep on a bed. 'Tell them, Baris.' Baris couldn't help but look smug. 'I kidnapped his

travelling companion. Say hello to Donna Noble.'

The creature was close but not too close. The Doctor looked up from the sonic field generator he was constructing from damaged parts of the air-conditioning system. Snowcap's heating had failed twenty minutes earlier, and the air had turned from furnace to freezing cold. Although there was roaring, the thawed alien didn't seem to be coming his way just yet. He flashed his sonic screwdriver at some components and was pleased to hear a low hum kick in. 'Now we're cooking with gas,' he whispered.

Ice shifted behind him. 'Donna?' Somewhere in the distance another man screamed and died.

The Doctor had not had much of a chance to see the creature and, with the bit of his brain not building a sonic field generator, he was running through the various life forms he had ever encountered to find one to match up with this beastie. So far, nothing seemed familiar – it wasn't a Gappa, Ice Warrior or anything he could recall that related to cold climates.

'There's something not right here,' he said aloud. 'It's all way too... B-movie.'

He waited for Donna to respond but remembered they had been separated.

The Doctor felt the air move, like an unfamiliar breeze had blown in: some flavour that didn't belong in the Antarctic. 'What's going on?' he demanded.

A man stepped out of thin air. A very familiar man.

The Doctor stood up. 'Now that shouldn't happen,' he said. 'What are you doing here? I mean, what am I doing there?'

The familiar man smiled and raised a very nasty-looking bleepy stick. He pointed the stick straight at the Doctor.

The meeting long over, Sebastiene and Baris watched the hunters transmat to their zones.

The control room in which they stood did not look like a control room. For a start, there weren't any controls. There weren't any consoles or computer banks or monitors either. Instead, huge gold busts of Sebastiene looked down from gigantic plinths onto a spacious marble chequerboard floor. The floor was full of robots. These robots seemed more to be dancing than working. One would wiggle a perfectly manicured hand in a certain gesture, and an air-screen popped into existence right in front of its nose. More hand waving as the robot completed its task and then the air-screen popped into nothingness again.

‘I’m still impressed,’ said Baris. ‘No skull-docks, no memory banks, no machinery. No solid-state matter at all. Just wave and up comes a menu.’

‘Of course,’ muttered the Supervisor robot as it stomped by. ‘Intelligent Molecular Technology is the most advanced technology in the universe.’ The giant creature towered over the quaking Baris.

Baris squeaked back: ‘As I say: I’m impressed.’

‘Hmph!’ The Supervisor grunted and stomped away.

Sebastiene waved a hand and a bed-sized throne shimmered into existence. ‘I find I am pleased,’ he announced. ‘The long years of planning are over. At last a real game. You know, some of those hunters in that silly society were almost impressive.’

‘I do suggest full surveillance, my lord,’ said Baris.

‘Permanent. You won’t believe how tricky he can be. Lots of people have underestimated him, and they always pay for it.’

Sebastiene yawned and waved up a bunch of grapes.

He plucked fruit from the vine and ate. ‘So how does it feel, Baris? Was it worth the pain, the long months? Now you have outwitted him, is he still your hero?’

Baris’s Doctor face flushed with colour. ‘The Doctor was... smaller than I expected.’

Sebastiene seemed pleased with the response. 'And so perishes the first myth of hero worship. Baris, they're always smaller. There aren't any heroes. Only winners.'

Baris nodded, impatient. 'So, you're going to give me the TARDIS. And the companion? When?'

'In time, Baris, in time. Oh you're a needy little thing, aren't you? You played your part very well. I didn't think you had it in you. The Doctor is on his way, his girl is safe and secure and we have the TARDIS.'

'Thanks.' Baris smiled a 'very pleased with himself' smile.

'And now I'm wondering: what's the point of you?'

Sebastiene dropped the grapes to the floor. He dabbed his chin with his handkerchief. 'Oops.'

The smile leaked from Baris's face. 'I... I didn't mean. Please...'

Sebastiene rose and squeezed the imposter's shoulder.

A perfectly manicured hand: soft and powdered. 'A joke.'

Baris swallowed.

'I do need you, Baris. To monitor the Doctor. You're right, of course. I shouldn't allow myself the luxury of overconfidence.'

'Yes, Lord.'

'Night and day. Don't take your eyes off him.'

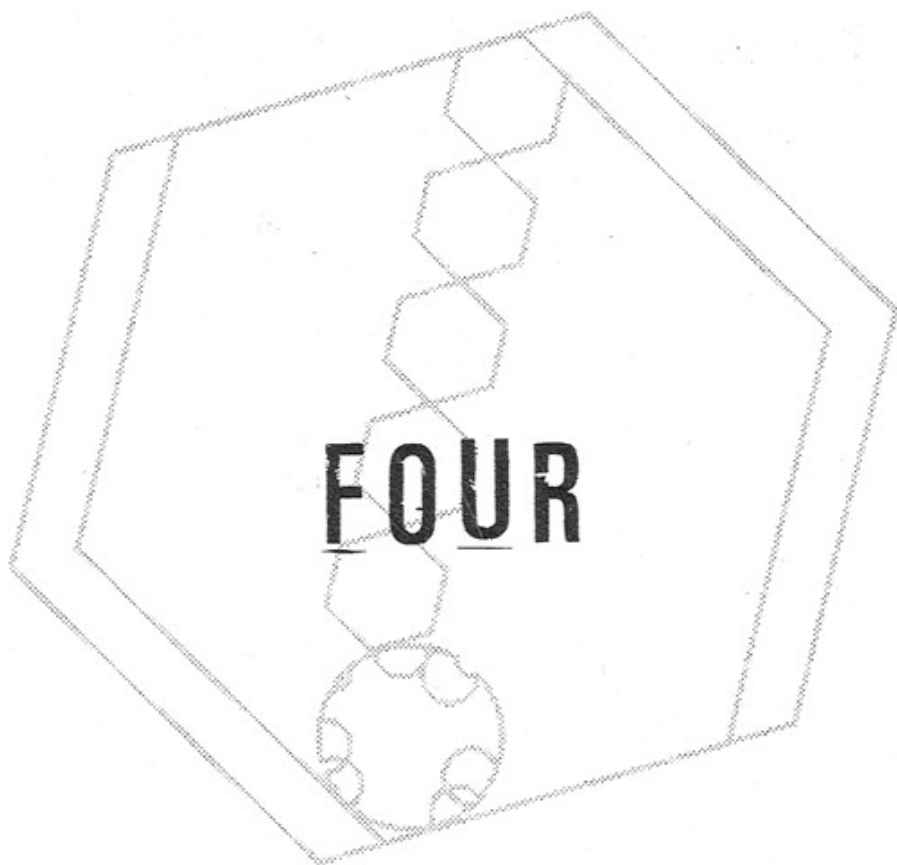
‘We have detected the Doctor,’ said one of the robots.

‘He has arrived in the Oroobian Jungle Zone.’ A large central air-screen revealed a steaming hot jungle.

‘What a depressing hole,’ said Sebastiene. ‘What sort of self-respecting hunter would live here?’

‘The zone is matched to—’ a robot began.

‘Oh it doesn’t matter,’ Sebastiene interrupted. He studied the quiet, dreary jungle. ‘Ding ding,’ he sang tunelessly. ‘Round One.’



Lord Percy plucked the fat cigar from his mouth and

raised his glass. He was on the verge of sipping when he stopped and glared. A hot writhing fly had plopped into the champagne and was furiously trying to swim its way out. Bally creature must have been tempted by the sweet aroma. Lord Percy knew only too well what awful diseases these jungle flies carried. Even robot copies of jungle flies.

‘Absolute swine!’ he bellowed and hurled the glass against the nearest tree. ‘Wallah! More champers and on the double!’

Lord Percy was in a cheerful mood. The Doctor had appeared in his zone first. The hunt was going to be over very quickly. ‘Likely to spoil the game for everyone else,’ he said, chuckling. Lord Percy puffed on his cigar again. ‘What a shame.’

Somewhere in the distance his Rhinon Beaters were thrashing the jungle for the Doctor. The sun was high in the sky and the zone was boiling hot. Some people believed Lord Percy found the green forested hills and tropical sky stimulating, but they were wrong. Only one thing stimulated Lord Percy, and that was the kill. He enjoyed being a member of the Society; proud to belong to such a distinguished club.

Still, a chap had to admire Sebastiene’s handiwork.

Planet 1's terraformers had nailed the Oroobian landscape, including the flies. And that awful stink of lemons. Just like home. Jolly clever.

Even the Levantines seemed real; the braying, moronic giant beasts of burden on which he rode. Levantines were like Earth elephants, only stupider. Lord Percy liked stupid, dumb animals. They never learned. He kicked the Levantine he was riding. The beast responded with a satisfactory bleat of pain.

'Serve you right,' Lord Percy sniggered.

Loud bangs boomed in the humid air. Lord Percy grabbed his Levantine's rubbery ears and stood up in his howdah. Up country, smoke rose in spirals. That was the signal. His chaps had cornered his prey. 'About time too.' Yes, today was to be a good day.

'Bearer!' he bellowed. 'Forget the champagne. Too bally slow.' He whacked the Levantine's head with his cane to get it moving. 'I'll thrash you later. We've got the blighter!'

The Doctor was sure he had found inventive ways to escape from more perilous situations than this, but for the life of him he couldn't remember any.

He was running along a jungle river pursued by large stocky aliens with big horns sprouting from their faces

where noses ought to have been. Huge green trees hung down over the river, close enough to lash him with their heavy fleshy leaves. The air was humid and squeezed the breath from his lungs.

As the beast men howled behind him, the Doctor changed tack and scrambled up a boggy bank. Heavier, larger creatures were following the rhinoceros men. He was being hunted.

He forced himself to concentrate. Branches snapped behind him. Concentrate!

He was the Doctor. Donna was in trouble, and he had to find her.

A good thought. A useful thought. A thought that kept coming at him, like waves on a beach.

He was the Doctor. Donna was in trouble, and he had to find her.

If only he could think. The Doctor tried to fight past the exhaustion, the panic and the heat to reach into his past. He couldn't remember anything. Nothing! Certainly not travelling to a hot jungle. Where was the TARDIS?

The Doctor stumbled over a fallen tree. He yelled as he rolled down an incline and into a sunny clearing. He lay in the bright light, chest heaving. If only he could catch his breath, the rest would surely come back to him.

He was the Doctor. Donna was in trouble, and he had to find her.

A man was waiting for him in the clearing. Behind the man, a big leathery creature that looked like a stupid elephant raised its trunk and hooted. The man was dressed in jungle fatigues and had a cigar clenched in his gap-toothed grinning mouth.

‘I say, hello,’ said the man and raised a large gun. ‘Hold still now.’

So after all Sebastiene’s fine talk, the Doctor was going to be taken more easily than a pot-bellied Dimsloth. Lord Percy was almost disappointed.

‘Wait,’ said the Doctor. ‘Something’s wrong.’

‘We’ll discuss that later, old chap.’ Lord Percy squinted down the barrel.

The Doctor fell to his knees, blinking in fear.

Lord Percy smiled. He imagined his entrance into Sebastiene’s gigantic state room and throwing the Doctor’s lifeless body onto that fancy table. The look on that arrogant puppy’s face? Priceless.

‘Don’t you worry, old chap, this won’t hurt a bit.

Actually, it probably will. But not for long.’

There was a shimmer of light, wind rustled through the jungle leaves, and the Doctor faded from view.

Lord Percy blinked. Something cold and scary began crawling in his mind. In the sunlit clearing, right in front of his eyes, there was a big hole full of nothing where the Doctor had once knelt.

Impossibly, his quarry had escaped.

‘Oh, corks,’ said Lord Percy as he felt the warmth of a transmat beam envelop him. His jungle faded away.

Sebastiene leaped from his throne. All around the control room, robots were shaking their gorgeous sculpted heads in disbelief.

‘He disappeared!’ Baris shrieked. He waved his hands at the air-screen in front of him. The screen shimmered and popped into nothingness, just as the Doctor had done. Baris looked guiltily at Sebastiene, as if he had touched something he shouldn’t.

Sebastiene was too busy realising he was shocked to notice. The emotion was unfamiliar, but he recognised the symptoms from long ago. Conflict and surprise triggered the release of certain chemicals in his augmented body; which in turn upped his heart and respiratory rates. These changes were perceived by his conscious self as excitement and fear. Yes, he was shocked.

The Doctor had disappeared, and Sebastiene did not know how he had managed it. ‘Transmat,’ Sebastiene

whispered. 'He used the transmat.'

'Impossible, my master,' said the Supervisor robot.

'There is no access. He couldn't transmat.'

'Shut up. I don't want "he couldn't transmat". He transmatted, you moron. Use your eyes.' Sebastiene scratched his perfect chin. He felt his heart slowing, his breathing returning to a steady rhythm. 'So, Baris, how did he do it?'

Baris shrugged. 'A method we didn't anticipate.'

'Really?' Sebastiene cooed. 'And here was me, thinking you were an idiot.'

Baris quivered. 'An accomplice then?'

'What do you mean?'

'Perhaps he had help. One of the other hunters? You know, snatching him away from the opposition to bag the prize.'

Sebastiene was going to say something rude then changed his mind. 'Impossible. They lack the technology. Anyway, how would they know where he was? They're not monitoring anyone. There's no one in orbit. Is there?' The Supervisor shook his head.

'Maybe someone here isn't who they say they are,' said Baris. 'Someone in the Chateau.' He cringed, as if expecting a lightning bolt any second. 'And you do have

an awful lot of servants.'

Sebastiene turned to his Supervisor and beckoned him forward. The Supervisor obeyed.

'Bow down,' Sebastiene ordered. Again, the Supervisor obeyed and Sebastiene punched the robot's head out of its neck socket. The oversized servant staggered, then uttered, 'Thank you, my master,' before wiggling its head back on straight and picking up its tricorn hat.

Sebastiene slumped back onto his throne. He had a thought. 'Oh, did I lose my temper?'

'Yes, my master,' replied the Butler.

'It's been so long. One forgets.' He waved his hand at the servant. 'I've skinned my knuckles; look. There's blood and everything.' He held the hand up – watching as the bio-nanos in his bloodstream repaired the broken skin. In seconds, he was healed.

'Planet 1 has only one master,' said Sebastiene. 'Can only have one master. All my robots have absolute loyalty burned into their little brains. To me. Try attacking me if you don't believe me. If they have a fault, it's that the little darlings can be over-protective to the point of idiocy. There is absolutely no way that a Planet 1 robot can go against that fundamental programming.' He looked Baris in the eye. 'So find out what really happened.'

‘Immediately,’ said Baris, summoning up the courage

to add: ‘There is one other thing.’

‘Pray enlighten me.’

‘If the Doctor could transmat once, couldn’t he just do it again?’

A very nasty thought was growing in Sebastiene’s mind. A thought so improbable, so monstrous he could barely contemplate its existence. Baris looked at the floor.

‘He’s breached the IMT security protocols,’ said Sebastiene. ‘Him or someone helping him. He can access Planet 1 technology.’

Baris nodded.

Sebastiene thought. He thought some more. He turned to his Supervisor. ‘Shut down the IMT,’ he said.

The vast control room went quiet. Robots stopped to look.

‘My master,’ said the Supervisor, ‘Baris is wrong. What he is suggesting is impossible.’

The Supervisor winced, knowing what Sebastiene thought of servants who talked back.

‘You heard me,’ Sebastiene insisted. ‘The transmat was operated; we do all agree on that, do we not? How vulgar if he were able to use the same trick twice. All molecular transmissions are to be spiked. Forget digital, we’ll go

analogue.'

If a robot could look sick, the Supervisor was that robot. 'My programming requires to me to ask, my master. I must have confirmation you are sure you want to neutralise all Intelligent Molecular Technology? Are you absolutely one hundred per cent sure?'

Sebastiene lay back in his throne and contemplated the highly decorative ceiling. He was calm, or at least seemed so. 'Planet 1 can easily handle the changeover. Just do it.' The Supervisor nodded to the operator robots. They opened air-screens and began work. 'The changeover will take time, my master. Planet 1 will have to drop to maintenance mode for...' he clicked his neck as his brain sifted through the calculations, '... two hours and forty-seven minutes. There will be minimal robot activity during that time.'

'I can live with that.' Sebastiene continued to examine the ceiling. 'Do you good to do some real work for a change. Activate the underground monorail network and mobilise robot maintenance crews. Don't let the standards slip now. You never know, it might even be fun. Baris?' Surprised to be addressed, Baris shook himself to attention. 'Lord Sebastiene?' 'Theories?'

Baris bit his lip. 'I should have guessed something was up. The Doctor got trapped so easily. It didn't seem like him.' The duplicate gave a sick smile. 'You think this two-hour changeover is a good idea? I mean, it sounds like the Chateau will be vulnerable at that time. What if the Doctor transmatted here?'

'He couldn't. And all my ideas are good.'

'Yes, but what if he did?'

'The Doctor didn't transmat here. Even he couldn't bypass those security force-field protocols.'

Baris breathed deeply, gathering his courage together.

'Yes. But what if he did?'

Sebastiene spoke calmly. 'Planet 1 would have detected him. Wouldn't do for anyone to come here and start sabotaging my planet. No, my guess is he, or someone, just pressed shuffle and automatically fast-forwarded him to the next hunting zone. That would be the most efficient, easiest way to escape.'

'He's probably gone to look for his companion,' said Baris. 'He tends to do that. Perhaps she knows something.'

Sebastiene felt a surge of panic as he realised that, at last, someone had got one over on him. The Doctor had bested him at the first attempt, and they all knew it.

‘Lord Sebastiene?’ asked Baris.

‘The companion is safe. Only I am to know where.’

Sebastiene realised he looked shaken. He glanced up at one of his statues to remind himself of the correct expression; the expression that gave nothing away.

‘Leave Donna Noble to me,’ he said. ‘Otherwise, you have priority in the Chateau.’

‘The robots won’t like that. They don’t like me.’

‘They don’t like anyone, Baris. I programmed them that way. Live with it.’ He sniffed. ‘I’m going to bed.

Assam tea and caviar in the morning,’ he ordered. ‘Oh, and wake me up when Lord Percy is prepared. I want a little word with him.’

Sebastiene waved a hand and transmatted away.

The Butler showed Baris to his bed-chamber. The Doctor’s double was not unduly surprised to see that the room was a monument to poor taste. He winced at the vast bed: a football field of lace, all in a tasteful shade of bright sunshine yellow. ‘Nice,’ he said.

‘It’s perfect,’ said the Butler. ‘A masterpiece of design and comfort.’ The robot was genuinely pleased with the room.

‘You know, I love the way Sebastiene calls you

“robots”,’ said Baris. ‘Seems wrong somehow. You know,

too generic. Not “servitors” or “droids” or anything. Just “robots”. Some artificial persons would consider that an insult but it’s good to see you rivet-heads are totally cool with the word.’

Huge hands enveloped Baris’s neck and lifted him into the air. Two oversized eyes blazed at him. ‘You think you’re so smart,’ said the Butler.

Baris struggled but couldn’t shift the steel fingers.

‘What did I say?’

The Butler smelled of pomade and grease. Its moustache was so big and furry Baris thought it was going to leap off its face and attack him. The giant hands squeezed. ‘I don’t like humans, and I especially don’t like you. My master is the sweetest, most loving genius who ever existed, and I will do anything to keep you away from him. There’s something about you, Baris. Something wrong. I know.’

‘You’re out of your mind!’

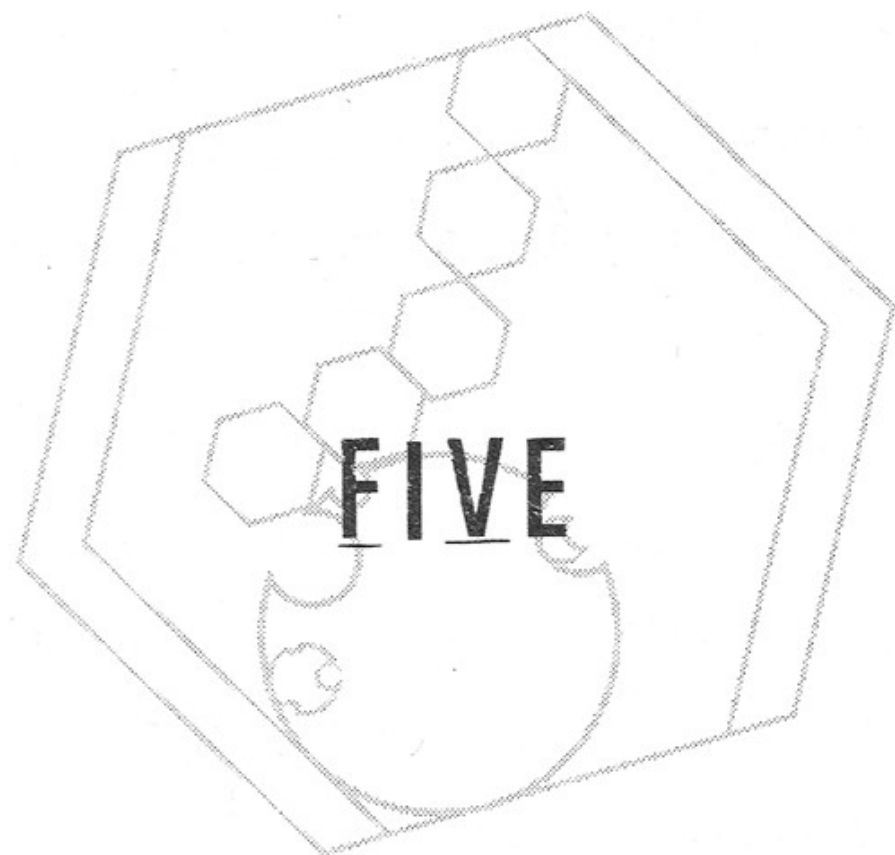
‘No I’m not,’ said the Butler. ‘I don’t like you wandering round the Chateau doing whatever you please. Until the Doctor is caught and we’re back to normal, I’ll be watching you. All the time. And when you make your move, which you will, I’ll be there.’

‘What move? There is no move!’

The Butler threw Baris on to the bed. ‘And when the time comes, I’m going to squeeze your head until your eyes pop out. Good night. Sweet dreams.’

And with that, the Butler flounced away.

Baris glared after him, rubbing his sore neck. After a few minutes, he lay back on the impossibly comfortable sheets and closed his eyes. ‘Yeah,’ he said. ‘I’ll get you, Butler.’



The jungle was gone; now he was in an oven. All right, a desert but it was as hot as an oven.

The Doctor lay back and breathed deeply. The air tasted

of hot bricks. He heard no sound but the rustle of sand swirling in a baking wind. Granules stung his face and hands. Already his body was caked in sweat. Water was evaporating from him at an alarming rate.

Aching in the heat, he turned over and stood up.

Definitely a desert. The land was flat and broken only by some distant flat-topped hills. There was nothing here but red dust.

He wondered why that gap-toothed man had tried to kill him. Part of him thought he knew the reason but he just couldn't remember it. What was going on?

Even the scorching light from the twin suns seemed heavy. When the Doctor tried to stand, he felt he was pushing through treacle. He realised it wasn't going to take long before he was absolutely exhausted. Even with the two hearts, this barren place was going to push him to the limits. He had to find Donna. He had to keep going.

Wearily, he stumbled towards the nearest hill. There might be some shelter there, some shadow to give him a moment's rest and time to come up with a plan. He was here for a reason, he guessed that. So who was going to try and kill him next?

Next morning, Baris was back in the control room, annoying the servants. He was watching the operator

robot overseeing the IMT changeover.

The Supervisor paced the control room behind him, footsteps ringing on the marble floor, trembling with helpless rage at Baris's interference.

'Why don't you go and do something useful?' it sneered. 'Like throw yourself off the ramparts.' It loomed over Baris's shoulder.

Baris sagged. 'What is it with you lot? Talk about feeling welcome. I'm just doing what Sebastiene ordered me to. If you're not going to stop me, get lost.'

'Oh no, Baris,' it said. 'I'm keeping my eye on you.'

'Change the record. That's what the Butler said. You robots are so... mechanical.'

'Sixty per cent cloud saturation,' said the operator robot, interrupting the argument. Baris and the Supervisor turned to look.

'And what does that mean?' asked Baris.

'Satellites are cloud-seeding the atmosphere with negative ion-particles...'

'Don't tell him!' snapped the Supervisor.

'Mr Supervisor,' said Baris, 'why don't you go and do something less boring instead? I'll call you if I need you.'

He returned to the operator robot. 'What's the score? I mean: the seed status?'

Conscious that the Supervisor was on the verge of tremendous violence, the operator robot spoke in a small voice. 'Energy transference is no longer reliable. Transmat effectiveness is already down to thirty per cent. By morning, it'll be less than five. We're six hours away from changeover.'

'From now on, no one's going anywhere,' said the Supervisor. 'Including you.'

Baris ignored the comment. 'And the Doctor? He was the last one to use the transmat, wasn't he?'

The operator robot coughed. 'Well, no. The master used it to send... Ow!' The robot flinched as the Supervisor slapped its head.

Baris nodded, amused. 'Of course: the companion.'

'No,' said the Supervisor evasively. 'No, not the companion. Someone else entirely...' It looked at Baris; unable to conceal the lie behind its bland face.

Baris returned an equally bland expression. 'I'm only interested in the Doctor. You must have picked him up by now. Where is he? Tell me, or I'll tell Sebastiene you—'

The Supervisor pointed a perfectly manicured finger at the air-screen. 'There. The Flux Savannah.'

'The what-a-hoo?'

The Supervisor blinked; consulting its memory bank.

‘The Arcturan. Semblance of Draxyx.’

Baris clapped the Supervisor on its large, muscular back. ‘Thank you, chaps, splendid effort.’

‘Is that it?’ asked the Supervisor. ‘What are you going to do now?’

Baris was already halfway out of the door. He turned back, leaned forward and pinched the Supervisor’s nose.

‘Probably best if you keep *that* out,’ he smiled.

‘I’ll report this outrage!’ snapped the Supervisor.

‘Baris!’

But Baris had already gone.

Planet 1 changed over.

Across the globe, silos opened, warehouse doors rolled up and long disused monorail stations flickered into electric life. Automated airfields raised atmosphere craft into launch positions. After many decades, factories began to make real things again.

Clouds spread from the polar zones; clouds seeded with particles generated in orbiting satellite stations. The clouds moved quickly through the troposphere, igniting storms wherever they thickened. Electricity buzzed and forks of lightning crashed down, pouring energy into specially constructed reservoirs.

The robots bustled. Millions of them: churned out of

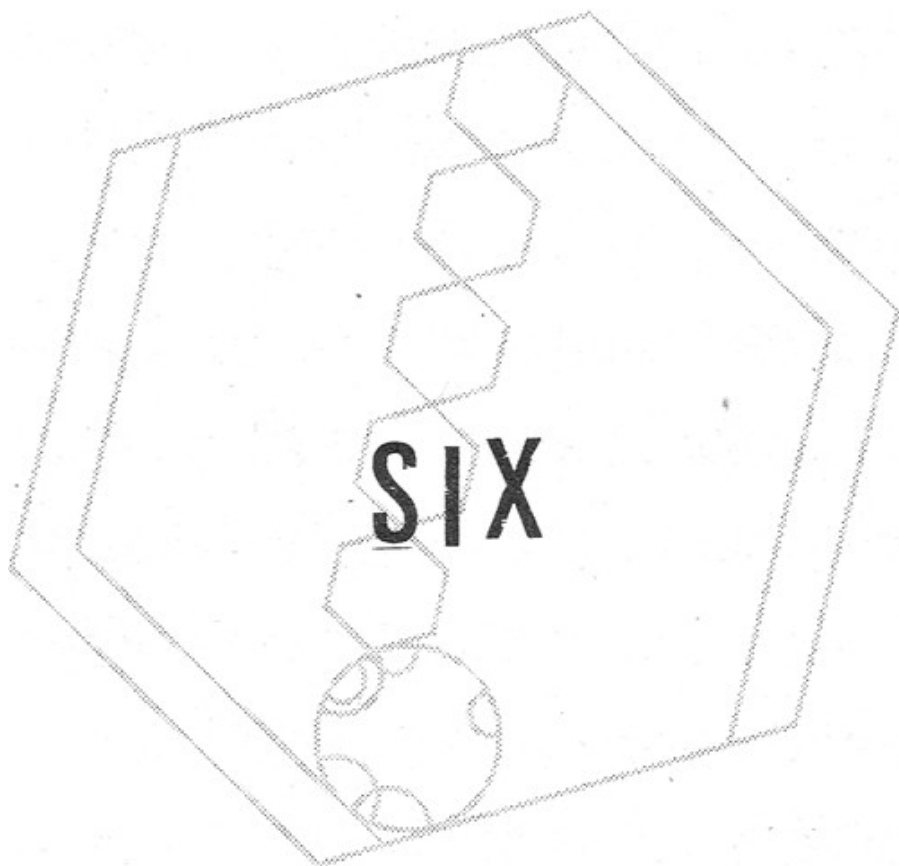
their storage containers and gathering in legions across the surface of Planet 1. They swarmed above, on and below ground. Planet 1 had never been so busy, well not for the sixty-nine years since Sebastiene had last bothered to test these support functions. The robots worked tirelessly in the wind and the rain. Like armies of ants, they unblocked concealed entrances and raised gigantic communication masts across rain-lashed muddy plains. Beneath the oceans, robots activated oceanic thermal power units to drive unthinkable powerful fusion motors. They worked without pause, and if one robot malfunctioned due to systems failure, accident or plain old wear and tear, another two leaped into the breach to take its place. The work gangs were on a deadline; the clock was ticking. All this to capture one man. Robots didn't have opinions but if they did, they must have hoped he was worth the effort.

The clock ticked and ran down. Lights winked out into darkness across the planet, from the poles to the equator. The robots stopped where they stood. The great roaring whirl of labour ceased.

Planet 1 rebooted.

Only the hermetic bubbles of the hunting zones were spared. The hunters were oblivious to the planet's

business. They did not notice the switchover from molecular to physical in the command patterns of the robots designed to look like natives of their respective planets. These were kept functioning. Oblivious, the hunters just got on with their lives. And waited.



At last the Doctor had what he needed: peace and quiet. He wiggled his hand to activate an air-screen. Nothing. Just the dark of his over-heated, over-designed bedroom. 'Finally,' he said.

Apart from anything else he was tired of pretending to sleep. He tiptoed to the door, opened it and poked his head

out. 'Let's go for a wander,' he said to himself.

'Now then, now then, boys and girls,' he said aloud.

His words echoed round the empty halls. Robots stood where they had been halted, frozen in mid-step, carrying trays, walking, fixing. Their eyes flickered with dim internal lights as their brains sat on standby.

Mustn't get too confident, the Doctor thought.

Sebastiene wouldn't be stupid enough to turn them all off.

Some will still be operational.

The Doctor looked up at one of the huge marble busts of Sebastiene stuck up everywhere all over the Chateau. The pouting bronze face regarded him. The Doctor took that as a cue and addressed it.

'So what's my big plan, clever clogs?'

The face did not move.

'All right, I'll tell you. Locate Donna. Although, of course, you will have made that the hardest thing in the world. Don't leave much to chance, do you? In fact, I wonder if you already know about me being him here and him being me out there?'

Still, the perfect metal face gave nothing away.

The Doctor shook his head. 'Nah. If you were that clever, Sebastiene, old son, I wouldn't even have got this far. Time to go on the attack.' The Doctor bared his teeth

and smiled. ‘Grr.’

Baris had made a fatal mistake. In fact, in the corridor at Snowcap Base, he had made THE fatal mistake.

The Doctor didn’t blame his double; clearly Baris was young and naive and not used to having Time Lords at his mercy. Rather than simply using the beepy stick he was pointing at the Doctor, Baris had chosen to boast. He chose to gloat. About The Plan.

Baris wasted precious time bigging up The Plan and of course stressing his own importance in The Plan’s inevitable success. And if you did the gloating thing with the Doctor, you were going to come last.

So the Doctor heard about Sebastiene and the hunters with their dumb wager. He heard about Planet 1 and its awesome store of power. He heard how they wanted him to pursue Donna and the TARDIS.

Funnily enough, after all that, the real surprise to the Doctor was Baris himself.

The Doctor knew he had fans; he just didn’t know he had so many. Thousands of them plugged into their skull-docks, scouring the galaxy for news, rumours, even sightings. Baris was a fan; in fact, he was generally considered the biggest, which is why Sebastiene had tracked him down and made him an offer he couldn’t

refuse. Baris had been offered the chance to *become* the Doctor; companion, TARDIS and all.

‘Which is sad,’ the Doctor told Baris. ‘The best way for you to be like me, would be for you –’ and here he looked at his duplicate, ‘to be Baris. To be the best Baris Baris could be.’

The Doctor had guessed right. Beneath the remodelled face, the eyes of a little boy stared out. A little boy who spent too long in his bedroom. For the first time, Baris looked unsure of himself. The beepy stick wavered.

In the distance, the creature sent to Earth by Sebastiene roared and killed again. The Doctor made his move.

He skidded into the control room. The stalled robots were staring as if transfixed by what they saw. The room had filled around them. The chequerboard squares in the floor had opened and raised up solid skull-dock terminals; all busy uploading data. The Doctor inspected the new machines. ‘Virtual Reality interfaces, subatomic memory.’

He picked up a neoprene glove with glowing cables running from the fingers. Next he picked up a neoprene cap; a pair of large goggles hanging off it. ‘You are joking,’ he laughed. ‘What’s this: *The Lawnmower Man*?’

He stared into the barely lit eyes of an operator robot.

He had started internally to call the robot servants

Freddies, on account of their ridiculous moustaches.

‘I’ve landed in 1985! No more Intelligent Molecular
whatsit then, Seb, old mate. Sorry to mess up your planet.’

The Doctor wondered where the Supervisor might be.

Probably getting special Supervisor programming in a
special Supervisor’s room. Maybe he was getting his
ridiculous moustache trimmed. Funny, the Doctor
expected Sebastiene to keep that particular Freddie active
as a safeguard.

Surely somebody was suspicious. The Doctor couldn’t
believe he had been lucky enough to fool them all, all of
the time. Plucking Baris from Lord Percy’s gun sights had
been almost suicidal. They had even seen him do it. They
just didn’t know they had.

Thankfully, Sebastiene hadn’t bothered to protect the
transmat program; why would he feel the need to? The
transmat had been programmed for a prearranged random
shuffle. The Doctor just pressed the button earlier than
planned. The hard part had been making it look like
someone else had pressed it. Even now, he wasn’t
absolutely certain the command could not be traced back
to him.

More important was getting Sebastiene to turn off the
IMT. Not easy. However, the ruler of Planet 1 was as

suspicious as the Doctor had hoped. Sebastiene would rather lose the technology than share it.

So now the Doctor had some room. He could work without getting blown to atoms by a pointy finger. Easy. Yeah, easy.

‘Well,’ he said to himself, ‘easy apart from finding Donna, helping Baris escape the galaxy’s best hunters while at the same time staying undetected by a suspicious all-powerful loony and his planet of deadly robots. Not forgetting to zip back to Earth asap to stop a super absorby creature laying waste to the human race. Nothing to it.’

‘Right, Doctor!’ he bellowed. ‘Oops. Talking to myself. You see, man like me needs an audience. I need Donna. Which could be my downfall. What if Sebastiene has cameras and microphones and motion trackers running as a back-up to his back-up?’

The Doctor looked around. They could be any size, any shape...

‘Nah, even he can’t work that fast. Or can he? Never mind. Prioritise. That’s the name of the game. Doctor...’

He looked at his bare wrist. ‘You have one hour and forty-two Earth minutes...’

He shoved a Freddie out of the way and sat down at one of the gleaming new consoles. Luckily, he wasn’t

after anything tricky and the basic systems were up and running. He picked up a thin cable. ‘Skull-dock? No thanks. Never liked the idea of sticking needles into my head. Hat and glove it is.’

Pulling the goggles on, he powered up the computer terminal. Big shiny command icons floated in front of his eyes.

‘Ah, how sweet,’ he cooed. ‘But never mind retro. How do I get Baris out of the next zone? Especially as, more than likely, this time I’m going to be watched...’

He looked up and stared at the ornate panelled ceiling, slipping his mind out of gear so a brilliant idea would creep up on him.

Thirty-eight minutes later it did.

He worked the computer quickly, suppressing a giggle.

‘Get out of that, Sebastiene.’

Now the hard part. The really tricky bit.

He shuddered. Had something moved behind him? He lifted the goggles and the real world returned.

The Freddies with their glowing eyes seemed to know what he was up to. Their stillness was unnerving. The Doctor had the most extraordinary feeling that every time he went into the Planet 1 VR mode, they all took a step forward. They were just pretending. Soon they would

have their hands round his neck.

He took a deep breath, removed the cap and glove, stood up and faced them.

‘Look,’ he said. ‘If you’re going to rush me, don’t play games, just do it.’

He gave them a stern look. The Freddies didn’t move.

‘So shut up then,’ he said. ‘I’m going to ignore you. I have enough trouble from real threats; haven’t got time for imaginary ones.’

He put all the gear back on. Talking helped him concentrate. He tried to put on his brainy specs. They banged against the plastic goggles. Tutting, he put the brainy specs back in his pocket.

‘Think it through, Doctor. If you were Sebastiene, where would you put Donna so I couldn’t find her?’

He clicked his fingers. ‘It’s not hard to find a map...

The hard part is not looking like you’re finding a map...’

New icons swam into view.

‘Yes!’ yelled the Doctor. ‘Result!’

Baris was in the control room accessing a Planet 1 computer interface terminal. He wasn’t even using the skull-dock. It was like he wanted to be caught.

The Supervisor was delighted. The robot was watching on a hidden monitor. It had kept itself out of the way for

just such an opportunity. It watched for five joyous minutes, savouring each one; then ran to tell its master the good news.

Sebastiene was using the downtime to practice his swordplay. He was in his gymnasium hacking at a couple of old battery-powered robots when the Supervisor rushed in.

‘Halt,’ Sebastiene ordered and the two robots lowered their swords. A final precise slash from Sebastiene’s sabre and one of them was cut in half. Its head and torso clattered to the ground.

‘Put your top back on,’ Sebastiene told it.

‘Fanks mrr lorrld...’ The robot legs walked away.

Sebastiene waved. When an air-screen did not appear, he remembered. No IMT. ‘Towel!’ he bellowed. His Butler stepped out from the shadows and handed him the warm, scented cloth.

The smirking Supervisor came forward with the news. Sebastiene wiped himself down and walked to the gymnasium wall. He pressed a button and the wood panelling opened to reveal a computer screen. On that screen: the Doctor’s duplicate sat goggled and gloved, busy in his virtual world.

The Butler and the Supervisor exchanged looks. Even

without seeing them, Sebastiene could sense their grins.

‘Whatever he’s doing,’ said the Butler. ‘I don’t like it.’

‘Who cares what you like?’ Sebastiene replied. ‘When did you start feeling entitled to an opinion? All the same, when did he get so smart with computers?’

The Supervisor snorted in triumph; an unpleasant sound. ‘He was connected to the mainframe when the Doctor transmatted. It’s possible...’

‘What’s possible? That he transmatted the Doctor himself? Never. He might have been a techie in his previous life but there’s no way Baris could understand the Planet 1 transmat protocols then obliterate all traces. They’re complicated – with safeguards and failsafes and clever... firewall... type security gizmos.’

‘I’ll have him arrested, my master. Some torture will get the truth...’

‘Are you trying to get yourself disconnected?’

Sebastiene snapped. ‘I’ve given Baris free rein.’

The Supervisor gave up. He bowed. ‘As you wish, my master.’

Sebastiene looked at Baris waggling his fingers at the terminal.

‘On the other hand. Wouldn’t hurt to check.’ He looked to his Butler. ‘Where’s the harm?’

The Doctor had just made it back to bed when Planet 1 completed its reboot. There was a distinctive hum and the candles by his four-poster flickered. He closed his eyes for the cameras and pretended to sleep.

The door crashed open. ‘Oi,’ said the Butler. ‘Outside now.’

‘If I didn’t know better,’ said Sebastiene, ‘I would have said you were the real Doctor and poor old Baris was out there being hunted.’

‘Really?’ said the Doctor. Sebastiene’s eyes never dropped from looking straight at him. ‘Why would you say that?’

They were taking tea in a huge formal garden. There was quite a party.

Somehow, Sebastiene had turned night into bright sunny day. Robot aristocrats in frock-coats and high white wigs were being terribly witty to each other. Beautiful snooty women in puffed out low-cut dresses hid their mouths behind fans as fancy-jacketed bucks tried to impress. Dogs draped in ludicrous silk bows yapped and played around the carefully sculpted bushes. A string quintet played Boccherini in a garish wooden bandstand. Sebastiene’s face was everywhere: on the dog drapes, the carefully cut hedges, even the statue in the ornamental

fountain.

‘You should have seen the place before I arrived,’

Sebastiene said. ‘No sense of style.’

At last, he lowered his eyes. He winced and waved a handkerchief at the Doctor’s jacket and sneakers. ‘You really must try and join in. I mean, really. I know you’re the big fan and everything, but clothes, man, clothes.

Have some style. I mean, look at me!’ Sebastiene pointed to his own pink, gold-braided blouse.

‘I apologise. Let me change immediately,’ the Doctor leaped from his seat.

‘Oh, sit down, for heaven’s sake. Honestly.’ Sebastiene snapped his fingers for a servant. ‘More tea and hurry up. Look, Baris, old chap, I know my robots can be a little difficult but you’ve done a jolly fine job with this Doctor-monitoring thing. With all respect, when I found you on Proxima I thought you were a right charlie.’

The Doctor forced himself to look relaxed as he tried to comprehend Sebastiene’s mood. Was this all flummery? Did he know the truth?

Butler Freddie set down a tea service on a silver tray, tiny in the robot’s huge hands. ‘Shall I be mother?’ it snarled at the Doctor.

‘Now now, Butler,’ said Sebastiene. ‘You boys play

nice.'

Butler Freddie tried to smile, it really did but that big-toothed grimace didn't convince a fly.

'Yes, my master.'

'Now go away, like a good boy.'

'Yes, my master.'

Sebastiene poured milk and tea into the gilt-lined porcelain cups. 'Of course there's no getting around it,' he said absently. 'If one applies logic, you have to be the real Doctor.'

The Doctor froze.

How would Baris react? Run in screaming terror was tempting but not necessarily productive. Keep going; keep going right to the end.

'Why... why would you say that?' he asked.

'Oh, you know,' said Sebastiene, and using a delicate pair of tongs dropped two sugar lumps into the cup.

'Deduction. Someone had to operate the transmat.' He smiled and offered the Doctor the cup. 'It wasn't me, and you are the only other organic life form in the Chateau. Sugar?'

'No, thank you,' the Doctor croaked. 'Too sweet.'

Sebastiene held the cup absolutely still. The Doctor was aware of the noise of the party around him, the

warmth of the summer's day, the scent of the bushes.

None of it real. Perhaps Sebastiene could control Time too. Because Time seemed to have stopped.

'No such thing,' said Sebastiene at last. He lowered the cup. 'As too sweet, I mean. Shall we hunt?'

He sipped his tea. 'Armourer!'

A previously unnoticed weaselly robot came bowing and scraping to the table. He held two wooden boxes. Sebastiene took one box, opened it and showed off the ancient pistol within, nestled comfortably as it was in purest purple velvet. '1788 French flintlock with inlaid silver handle. Crude but looks good.' He tossed the box into the Doctor's lap. The Doctor picked the weapon out as clumsily as he dared.

Sebastiene watched him. 'I've hunted down every single worthwhile prize in the universe,' he said. 'Lured them here; given them every chance. Not just animals either. Or those poor old dumb species that silly Society prides itself on wiping from the face of the universe. You try snaring a Dalek, or an Osiran.'

Sebastiene leaned back in his chair, looking into the distance. 'Such a long time ago. Chap loses the instincts. Gets rusty; starts to miss obvious clues.' He sighed. 'I'm too long out of the game.'

He opened the other box and removed the second pistol. He flung the box away. The Doctor looked up to see the weapon aimed straight at him. Sebastiene grinned. 'The only real test would be if I shot you and you changed shape. You know, like the Time Lords were supposed to. What were you doing with that computer last night?'

The Doctor stared into the black cylinder. Indeed the gun was crude but at this range cruelly effective. 'I was trying to find out who had operated the transmat. I thought the switchover might throw up an anomaly.'

'Did you really?'

'I... I... thought that... but I was wrong... maybe I'm too stupid, but I couldn't really operate the computer... You did say I could use the control room. It was just a thought...'

Sebastiene pulled the trigger. The Doctor flinched.

The gun's hammer clicked. No blast, no shot. Empty.

Sebastiene whispered, 'Bang.'

The Doctor again wondered what Baris would do and decided yes, this time he probably would panic. He shrieked and dropped his gun. 'P-please Sebastiene... look... what can I do... ?'

'Oh forget it. If there is a traitor, I'll find him. You want

my real opinion? I think the Doctor's playing us along, trying to get me to think he's stupid.' Sebastiene tapped his fine nose. 'I think there's a big plan.' He nodded, mock-serious.

The Doctor pretended to recover. He clutched his chest and sat down. He allowed his breathing to slow until he was able to speak again. 'That does fit the profile,' he said. 'Perhaps the companion... yes, perhaps the companion. You know, I could...'

Sebastiene was already shaking his head. 'No, Baris. Not the companion. She's mine.'

'What... what are you going to do with her?'

Sebastiene dropped the pistol, clapped his hands and announced, 'Bored! Let me show you my pride and joy!'

He looked up as if expecting something to happen.

'Ah, keep forgetting. We'll do it the old fashioned way. Shanks's Pony. We walk!'

They returned to the Chateau. Sebastiene led the Doctor at great pace through the marble halls. The Butler followed daintily behind.

'Where are we going?' asked the Doctor.

'Oh you'll love it,' Sebastiene replied as he marched to a pair of large doors. Two robots bowed and opened them. The Doctor followed, as did the Butler.

‘Not you,’ Sebastiene snarled at his slave, who bowed ungraciously and scurried off.

‘In here,’ he waved for the Doctor to follow. ‘If memory serves.’

Clearly memory did serve.

The room was vast, even by the standards of the Chateau. Dark too. The Doctor could not tell what was floor, what was wall; in fact, what was anything. The lack of reference points gave the room a sickly feel, like standing on a ship in a storm. After the garden he felt exposed. The only illumination came from tight shafts of artificial sunlight beamed down from the unseen ceiling like pencils. Inside each beam of light was a creature, perfectly still; some human but most not.

The Doctor understood the room’s function. He was inside a trophy cabinet.

‘Walk with me,’ said Sebastiene.

The Doctor followed but stopped as Sebastiene froze.

‘I forget,’ he said. ‘You’re not the Doctor with all his broad-minded experience of the universe. Careful, Baris, I should warn you that this room may well blow your tiny, sheltered mind.’

He grabbed the Doctor’s hand and led on. Clearly, this was to be a guided tour.

They passed creatures with scales, with fur, with feathers, with nothing at all. There was a gigantic armoured insect as big as an oil tanker which the Doctor recognised as a formic-acid-spraying Mmtefl Beast. There was an two-and-a-half-metre-tall cat creature caught in the act of pouncing.

‘Beserkat Feline from the planet Florinux,’ said Sebastiene and walked by without stopping. ‘Easy meat.’ They passed a passive Raston Warrior Robot, which the Doctor was certain was watching him from its smooth silver face. There was a Wirrn here and a Collective of Hive Rasps there. There were Omplets and Podropeds, horned Candellax and bio-mechanical Nominate Devourers. There were... well, there were too many for the Doctor to be bothered to count.

‘I fancy I possess the largest collection in the galaxy,’ said Sebastiene after half an hour’s walk. ‘I have every kind of predator here, from Aords to Zzorg Numerates. If it’s dangerous, I’ve bagged it.’

‘And you captured them all yourself?’ said the Doctor. ‘Captured and killed. Don’t worry, Baris, they’re all dead.’

‘Heads on the clubroom wall...’

Suddenly, the Doctor felt sick. How could anyone get

pleasure out of surrounding themselves with corpses,
whatever species they might be?

For once, Sebastiene seemed genuinely excited. 'I like lures best. I love it when a target falls into a trap of its own making; when it can't help itself. For example, that Hasarian Renderer –' Sebastiene pointed to a vicious-looking, toothy amphibian – 'I convinced her I was her mother.'

The Doctor nodded. 'The only thing the Hasarian is frightened of... the big queen.'

'Led her a merry dance. She was cautious, oh yes. Took me two weeks, up and down the canals of Hasaris, but she believed me in the end. Got her suckling and BANG!'

Sebastiene clapped his hands and sent a chilling series of echoes around the endless space. He smiled at the Doctor, who saw Sebastiene's teeth gleam in the pale light. 'You could say: I'm like a Terran angler fish.'

'The ones that grow fishing lines out of their heads?'

The Doctor sniffed. 'Not very pretty though, are they, your angler fish? Wouldn't have been my first choice of metaphor but then again –'

The teeth stopped gleaming. 'Why, Baris,' said Sebastiene. 'Well done you. You're developing his talent for the obnoxious. You're becoming more like the real

Doctor every day.'

Although he kept a neutral expression, the Doctor mentally ticked himself off. Stop being clever. You're not supposed to be you.

'Which coincidentally brings me to the reason you're in the Trophy Room,' Sebastiene squeezed the Doctor's hand. 'A room into which you are the first organic being ever to step. After me, of course.'

'Oh yes?'

Sebastiene walked to a new exhibit. 'This specimen I'm sure you'll find particularly interesting. Come on, he won't bite.'

With a gnawing feeling growing in the pit of his stomach, the Doctor walked to the trophy. 'The latest addition,' and the Doctor saw a gap-toothed grinning human. He held a cigar in one still hand, a glass of champagne in the other. 'Say hello to Lord Percy.' The Doctor decided to look appropriately scared again.

'Sebastiene...' he mumbled, 'I...'

'I thought he might amuse you. Bit of fun. Before we get down to work.'

'What do you mean, work?'

There was a chuckle from the dark. Butler Freddie had got here ahead of them. And if Butler Freddie was

chuckling, this was going to be bad. Sebastiene clapped his perfect hands again and more shafts of light flicked down from the impossibly distant roof. This time the beam illuminated not a specimen but a leather couch.

‘If you please...’ said Sebastiene.

The Doctor backed away. ‘Now look. What’s going on?’

Butler Freddie giggled again.

‘Come on,’ said Sebastiene. His voice was soft and purring. He made out that sitting on the couch would be fun. ‘Play the game.’

‘What do you want from me?’ asked the Doctor. He wondered whether now would be a good time to run. Would Baris run? Would he act anything like this? It was so difficult to pull off a good impersonation on the strength of one brief meeting. And there was always that nagging feeling that Sebastiene had seen through him all the time.

‘This won’t hurt a bit,’ said Sebastiene. ‘But the Doctor did escape. I’m sure you’re just who you say you are, but let’s bung you through the scanner to be certain, eh?’

‘I am Baris. You know I am.’

Sebastiene, for once, looked sincere. ‘What you should know about me, Baris, is that I am incapable of taking

anything at face value.'

Butler Freddie pointed and laughed. 'He's scared.'

The Doctor decided to give in. He had to see this deception through.

'Actually I'm not scared,' he snapped. 'Big-hands.'

Butler Freddie stopped laughing. 'Get on the scanner or I throw you on.'

'Fine.' The Doctor sauntered under the light beam to the couch. A smiling Sebastiene watched him all the way.

'No worries,' said the Doctor. 'I don't mind. In fact, I'd like to be scanned. Great. I think scanning's a really good idea. Let's confirm my identity. It would make me feel a lot better, oh yeah. Scan me. Fine. Everybody's going scanning. Scanning USA.'

'Stop babbling and get on,' snarled Butler Freddie.

Something metal snaked out from the couch and wrapped itself around his arm. The Doctor jerked back but the metal strap held firm. 'Intelligent handcuffs,' said the still-smiling Sebastiene. 'My idea.'

Another strap spewed out from the couch and encircled the Doctor's body. More followed. Their strength was surprising as they lifted him from the ground and lowered him onto the couch.

A bulky machine descended from the overhead

darkness. As it approached, large stainless-steel implements extended out from the main body. Electronic lights flickered. The Doctor fancied he could even hear the sound of a dentist's drill.

'Sebastiene,' he moaned.

'Just a little toy to see who's who,' said Sebastiene.

'DNA checker, Psyche-profiler, even a little gizmo that checks how many hearts. Oh, and when I said it wouldn't hurt, that was a little porky pie...'

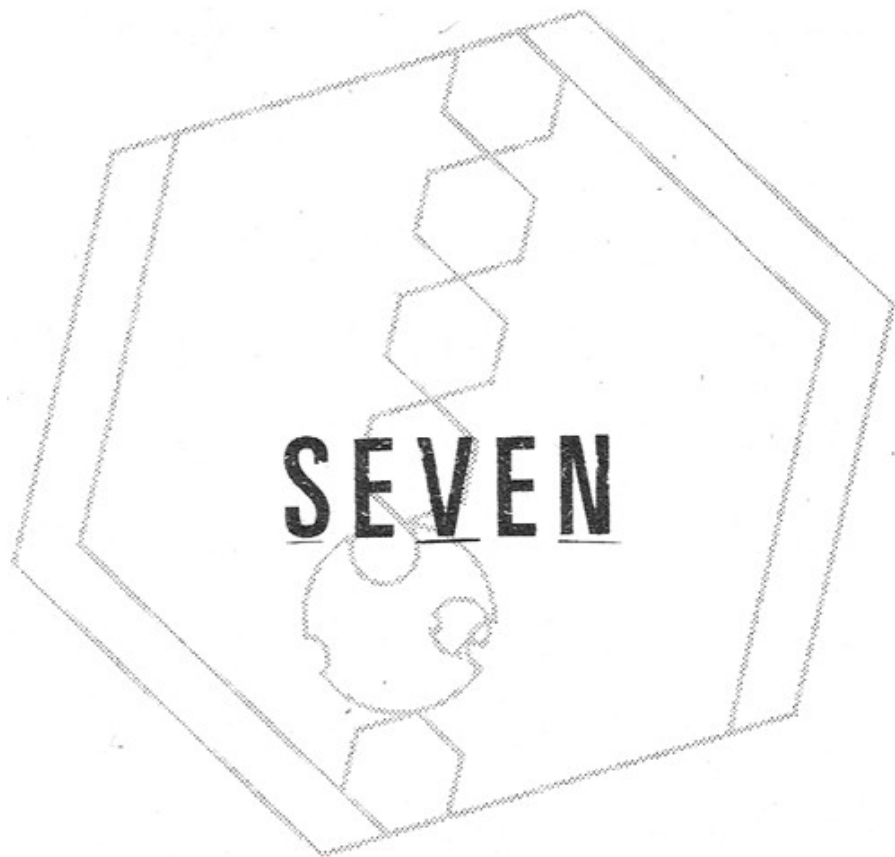
The machine started to hum.

Two hours later, the Butler lifted the Doctor out of the chair. The Doctor's face was white, ashen even, but he was still conscious. He glared but said nothing.

'Had to check, you understand?' said Sebastiene. 'No hard feelings?'

Trying to speak, the Doctor realised his mouth had gone numb. He pushed the Butler off and forced himself to stand.

Sebastiene blew at the nails on his right hand. He had been filing them throughout the process. 'Now let's get back to the game. Baris, you stick to keeping an eye on the Doctor. Don't let any robot stop you. You're the only one I'm sure of. Everything he does, you do. I want you to become the Doctor.'



Donna made a decision. She was going to get out of Bracknell.

Quite how she had travelled from an Antarctic Base to an Exquisite Traveller Hotel on the Reading roundabout was beyond her. Whatever the explanation, the time had come to get active.

Donna had been at the hotel for a day now, staying in Room 218. The weirdest thing was that although she often heard people talking in the corridor outside, when she opened her door there was never anyone there; just a snaky horrible carpet, closed doors and silence. Also,

when she was upstairs she often heard guests downstairs but whenever she went to look there was never anyone around.

The lobby was always deserted, except for Sadie, the smiling, perma-tanned receptionist who was always behind her desk. Donna was not warming to Sadie, who was too quick to offer a helping hand.

Too quick because, despite being terribly eager, Sadie never did any helping. She just came up with excuses. The public telephones had been taken out just last week; mobile reception was too weak to get a signal; the wi-fi was temporarily on the blink.

Donna could never get anywhere. Sadie was apologetic, but the result was the same. Of course, Donna could have just walked out, but the Doctor had left her that note. He had left the note with Sadie who, for one so useless at everything else, always knew exactly where to find it. The note was simple and in the Doctor's handwriting. Maddeningly, it just said: 'Wait for me.'

Who was paying for her room? He was.

The restaurant was always empty. Last night's excuse was that it was just closing, although Sadie did Donna 'a favour' and managed to fit her in.

The 'Anchor Suite', as the restaurant was called, was

deserted, although two young bland waitresses were clearing up the plates from what seemed to have been a banquet. There must have been a hundred people in here. How could they have got out without Donna seeing any of them?

When she asked, one of the waitresses replied that Donna had just missed the other guests, who had all 'gone for a night out'. Donna gave up and sat and stared at some photos of ships and tried to figure out what ships had to do with Bracknell. Her meal was carried to her table. Roast pork, roast potatoes and veg. Hotel food. Pensioner food. Last night had been dull. Even for Bracknell the hotel was dull. Donna had gone down to the Castle Bar ('try our delicious cocktails') but it never opened, not for delicious cocktails or anything else. It just stood in the dark; quiet and unmanned. Staff shortages, Sadie said.

At this point, Donna let rip. She gave the smiley cow an earful. Sadie smiled through the whole rant and could only apologise. No, the manager was away at the moment. Sadie was left in charge and she was only the receptionist. After banging her head on the reception desk, Donna announced she was going for a walk despite the fact that the sun had set and the day's incessant rain had still not stopped. She asked for a brolly but, of course, the hotel

had lost them all. ‘Normally we’re chock-a-block,’ smiled Sadie. ‘The day trip, I expect. Not your lucky day is it, madam?’

Donna looked out at that dark, drizzly night then decided to go to sleep. Maybe the Doctor would turn up in the morning.

When she got back to her room, the telly was on the blink. What a surprise. Without the energy for any more complaining, she flopped onto the bed.

Trouble was, at eight o’clock in the evening she wasn’t sleepy. She stared up at the badly artexed white ceiling. At eight thirty she decided to blame the Doctor for everything. That sent her to sleep.

Next morning was breakfast in the Anchor Suite.

Alone. Once again, she had just missed the other guests – they had apparently gone to a nearby shopping village. Back this evening.

Well, today Donna had had enough. Even Bracknell was better than this.

She started in her room. Donna squinted through her smeary window to see what she always saw: rain and another wing of the hotel just the same as this one. She could hear a distant rumble of traffic, the source of which she had not yet been able to locate.

No people.

Donna nodded to her reflection in the glass, watching it distort as the rain streamed down the outside pane. She sighed. ‘Time to...’ she said and then stopped talking.

‘Time to hit the road’, she was going to say, then had the strange thought that someone was listening. Someone listening on headphones for something important she might give away. Something creaked in the bathroom. Maybe he, whoever he was, was in there, listening away, keeping himself quiet; a human earwig.

She felt her heart beat. She could of course just open the door. Open the bathroom door and see that there was no human earwig in there listening to her. Just open it like she had opened it five minutes ago. No big deal.

Except, she already knew she wasn’t going to open the door. Not in a million years.

She started to wonder just how real this hotel actually was. She started to wonder just why she was here. Some part of her mind, a very important part, was starting to slip. She had to leave. Leave now.

‘Time to... look at yourself in a window.’ She winced at how that sounded and ran out of Room 218.

Two minutes later she was hiding behind a fire door, peering into the lobby. Halfway down the stairs she had

heard a vacuum cleaner start up in the corridor she had just left. Donna knew that if she went back up, the corridor would be empty again. Leave. Leave now. Donna creaked the fire door open. In the lobby, decrepit ferns sat in pots, bad RnB music played. No Sadie. Excellent.

Outside, rain was sweeping across the hotel car park. The wind threw itself at her as she ran outside. No fanfare, no klaxons. Just a stiff breeze and the knowledge that to avoid suspicion she had come out without a coat.

The car park was full of cars. Every space was taken. There was still no one about.

‘Hello?’ she yelled, surprising herself. Her voice fell flat in the rain. ‘Hello!’

There had to be someone. She was shocked at how much she had been hoping.

Donna looked back into the hotel. Nothing. No movement.

‘Just go,’ she made herself say. Then louder: ‘Just to the shops! Won’t be long!’

She sniffed and waited for a reply. ‘All right, then! Here I am, going to the shops!’

The road led up a hill. Not a steep hill, but enough to

hide the traffic she heard moving just on the other side.

That way to civilisation.

Donna started walking.

The road was longer than she had first thought. Must be the hill. She looked back to see the Exquisite Traveller sitting snugly in its place, looking like all the other Exquisite Travellers she had ever seen. Except there was still no one about. She tried to remember how she had got here. She couldn't, simple as that.

Donna started to run. The traffic noise was louder now. She was nearly there.

She raced up the hill, reached the top and stopped. The road ended at a T-junction. Straight ahead, a line of trees blocked a long ploughed wet field, which stretched on to another line of trees in the distance. There was a right turn and a left turn but nothing forward. No road signs and, strangely enough, the traffic sounds were now on either side.

'This can't be right,' said Donna.

Still the rain dropped. The roads curved out of sight in both directions.

'There has to be a way out.' Her voice was getting strained.

Donna was aware that wherever she was it wasn't an

Exquisite Traveller Hotel off a roundabout in Bracknell.

But then again, she had really known that for ages.

‘You don’t beat me,’ she growled. She raised her head and looked at the sky. A satisfying anger burned through her. ‘You don’t beat me! Whoever you are! I’ll find a way out!’

She turned right and marched along the road. There was an exit and, come hell or high water, Donna was going to find it.

Night had fallen again when Sadie the receptionist heard a noise outside. She walked out into the rain to find a soaked, wide-eyed Donna in the car park, screaming and begging for the Doctor. She was on all fours and covered in mud like she had fallen over in a field. Sadie put a coat around the girl and brought her back inside.

The Savannah was harsh country. Two suns sucked moisture from the air and baked the ground hard as diamond. Nothing lived in the Savannah except Suckweed and Soresox, the first a giant cactus with buried spines that waited for its once-in-a-hundred-years prey to walk over it, the second a scaly crocodile that looked like a rock. Both could survive without water for cosmological amounts of time.

Indeed, the Savannah was a deadly place, unless of

course you had your mechanised armoured Carapace to carry you round. The exalted biological remains of the Arcturan noble called Draxyx wore one such device and he loved it here.

In fact, the Semblance of Draxyx had himself a great Carapace, with specially designed six wheel drive, telescopic eyes that could see in nineteen different spectrums and a Hurt Limb equipped with a poisonous sting accurate up to two kilometres.

The Semblance loved the Flux Savannah. He loved its stark brutal simplicity. When he was hunting, his prey of choice would be dropped into this environment and he would chase round after it, wearing it down until finally it could run no more. Sometimes the prey would last for days; slogging on in agony, refusing to give up. The Semblance would perch in a gully or on a flat hilltop and suck on his moisture straw; telescopic eyes zoomed in on his quarry's plight.

Only when the light of resistance had totally gone out would the Semblance take pity on the poor creature and move in for the *coup de grâce*.

That was the moment the Semblance relished – when the quarry knew its only relief was death. When he stung his prey, it loved him for it.

The Semblance was very excited about the Doctor.

Although the Time Lord was of course known on Arcturus, there was very little hard information. What was not in doubt was that he was a very dangerous animal. The Semblance knew to be wary.

Once he had detected the Doctor's DNA signature, the Semblance projected his likely path. The Carapace computer flagged up a suitable killing ground: a shadowed gully between two rocky mesas; one of the few possible shelters in the blindingly bright desert. The Semblance motored to the gully and used his Excavator Limbs to dig a hole. He then sat in the hole, covered his Carapace in dust and waited.

In case he really was as dangerous as the legends claimed, the plan was to hit the Doctor with a paralysing sting and then see what happened. Not so much fun but hopefully there could still be some chasing and wearing down and despair. The Semblance switched his Carapace to stealth mode. The quarry was heading for the shadowy gully, right on schedule.

When the Doctor appeared in visual range and appeared to be nothing but a ragged, exhausted human in a torn suit white with dust, the Semblance was disappointed. Sebastiene's big talk had unsettled the

Society, even him. What a letdown. Suddenly bored, the Semblance decided to kill his prey immediately.

The Doctor stumbled towards the trap. The Semblance armed his Hurt Limb. Poison hissed through its fleximetal joints. A thought command unhooded the sting. As the Semblance giggled, the Carapace wheels began to turn in the dust.

And stuck there.

An alarm thought triggered in the Semblance's brain.

His Carapace wouldn't move.

The Doctor was closing; there wasn't much time.

Snarling, the Semblance revved harder. What was happening?

Something crunched into the wheels. A Suckweed!

The Semblance cursed. Of all the bad luck! He had been caught in the same trap he had set for the Doctor. But how could the weed have tracked him? The Semblance used screening sprays to stay undetectable.

Something else landed with a thump on the windscreen bubble. Cold, crystal eyes gazed in. Baked jaws opened to reveal a mass of stone teeth. The Semblance shivered in fear. A Soresox!

This couldn't be happening. A Suckweed and a Soresox together! Unheard of.

The Semblance, sweaty in his pickling juices, activated the Carapace charger. A quick powerful burst should do the trick.

A blast of electricity shook the Soresox but did not dislodge the beast. Mineral drool dropped onto the windscreen bubble from a wide, wide smile. At the edge of his perception, the Semblance saw the Doctor walk right past and through the gully. They were all so well camouflaged he hadn't noticed a thing.

The next thought that came to the Arcturan was that both the Suckweed and the Soresox were actually Sebastiene's robots but as soon as he remembered that, he had other things to worry about.

'Enlighten me,' said Sebastiene.

'The Doctor tricked the robots,' the Supervisor replied.

It looked about to wet itself. The robot quivered; towering over the seated Sebastiene. 'The on-site robots. He activated their Priority Override command.'

'The robots cannot be reprogrammed.' Sebastiene spoke in a monotone, stating a fact. He returned to his lunch; a vast lunch covering a whole banqueting table, all to himself.

'He didn't need to reprogram. The Suckweed and Soresox robots received input identifying the Arcturan as

a Class 1 threat.'

Sebastiene spat out half a roasted quail. 'Class 1? Me?

You mean, they thought the Semblance was in the process of attacking me? Despite all the evidence of their senses?

That's...' he searched for the word and found one he didn't want to say, 'brilliant!'

'They had to attack to protect you; couldn't help themselves. In fact, they couldn't do anything else.'

'And just how could the Doctor make this happen?'

The Supervisor slumped. 'Assuming it isn't Baris...'

'Which it isn't...'

'In theory, activating the Priority Override would not be hard. He would just need to know the robot transmission codes. Now we're no longer using IMT, all he had to do was look them up on a database. Assuming he had access to a terminal, of course.'

Sebastiene stood up, wiped his chin, and overturned the banqueting table. He spent a satisfying few minutes hurling food around. Silver plates rattled on the marble floor. The Supervisor stood still as his master raged.

At last, Sebastiene was calm again. He looked at the Supervisor. 'Get out of my sight. Find out.'

The Supervisor turned and trotted from the room, grateful still to be functioning.

The cold ruins stank of death. The shell hole was damp; full of bent iron and thick, grey slush. Overhead he could see a dark sky smothered by smoke. The only light came from the occasional orange flare falling from the clouds. Gunfire sounded tinny in the freezing fog. There was a war on.

The Doctor, or rather Baris who believed himself to be the Doctor, shuffled under a fallen concrete slab and shivered.

Any normal man would have been terrified at the prospect of being dumped in the war-torn wreckage of an alien city in a punishing winter, with no food, weaponry or means of survival. Luckily, thought Baris, he was the Doctor and he was no normal man. He was the Doctor, and he had to find Donna.

Cold though. His teeth chattered and his hearts pumped to keep the blood supply moving. Would have been handy to have a little bit more clothing than an old blazer, plimsolls and a skinny tie. Even the sonic screwdriver, with which he obviously could have warmed up snow or something, was missing. He must have dropped it somewhere.

Stone chinked over the lip of the crater. Baris stayed still, pressing himself into the wet shadows. He looked up

to see the skeleton of a burned-out factory etched black in light from a flare. Figures were moving in front of it, breath streaming from their mouths. They were hunched and bulky in ragged furs. Even from below, Baris could sense their hopelessness, their hunger. One whispered to another, a starved sound, thin and wispy. He didn't recognise the language but it sounded harsh and merciless. He didn't want to be spotted by these people. The figures moved slowly but carefully, long rifles ready, used to these ruins.

Baris had the strangest thought that if they found him, they would eat him. Abruptly, they were gone.

He pressed his fingers into the snowy, frozen rubble. Sweat turned to ice on his forehead. Baris forced himself to take a deep breath. He needed to shake off this strange paralysis that afflicted him. He had to work out who was sending him to these strange, deadly places. And why.

'Come on, Doctor,' he said to himself. 'You're better than this.'

And overriding everything, he had to find Donna. Commissar Weimark had almost forgotten he wasn't at home. He was so busy interrogating promising traitors that he hardly knew where the time went. As for Sebastiene and his wager, that all seemed a long time ago.

When the radio crackled, Weimark assumed the message was from his superiors; those cowards bunkered behind the lines at headquarters. Only Sebastiene's voice caused him to pause in his work.

Weimark straightened up from the reorientation chair. His client slumped. That man could wait. He had Society work.

Out of the bunker, Weimark sniffed and smelled cordite and ozone. The night air was cold and crisp. Indeed now he remembered, the planetary re-creation was amazing. 'I need my heavy weapons pack, dust coat and boots,' he ordered. His number two, Sub-Commissar Franz, clicked his heels and scampered back inside.

Rather: a robotic copy of his number two. Never be fooled, thought Weimark.

A missile whistled over the cityscape like a comet. Commissar Weimark read nothing into the phenomenon. He did not believe in omens.

'The Doctor, then,' said Franz upon his return.

'Indeed,' Weimark replied. He wondered how much of a memory Sebastiene had imprinted into this duplicate. 'I think we are not the first. I have been here a long time. The Doctor must have bettered at least one.'

'Should be a challenge.'

Weimark did not like talking to this robot. It was one thing to use them as servants, another to hear it address one with such familiarity.

‘Let us not confuse the hunt with sport,’ he told the robot. ‘Sebastiene expects us to lose.’

‘Sebastiene is indeed mighty.’ Franz’s fat face was expressionless. He handed Weimark his equipment.

‘The Doctor isn’t exactly a novice either,’ Weimark snapped. ‘He’ll be ready for me.’

‘You know him?’

‘By reputation only. He once landed on our planet.

Damn near ended the war in half an hour. No one could work out how he had reprogrammed our battle computers to shut themselves down like that. He had half the Eastern Mark army after him and still came through. Oh, he’s good.’

The Commissar hauled his tight black boots and dust coat over his body armour. The regular troops in Beriagrad received no such luxuries, only the Special Executive. The Blood Hounds.

Finally, Franz passed Weimark his weapons kit. The Commissar stripped and assembled his 8.25-millimetre sniper rifle. The case contained an impressive array of ammunition, steel tipped to high explosive; also an

infrared heat scanner and HUD night sight. Old friends.

Weimark recalled his greatest triumph: the eighteen-week hunt for the Western Mark's Chief Sniper. In the ruins of Beriagrad, sniping was the most effective method of waging war. The craft became an art, almost a religion, calling on the best of men. Snipers became legends, and Weimark was the greatest of them all. He had never missed. The Doctor would be the greatest triumph of his career.

'You know the reason for my success, Franz robot?' he asked.

'You are prepared for every eventuality, Commissar,' Franz replied, grinning graciously.

Weimark shoved an ammunition clip into his spare pistol and fired a high-explosive bullet into the robot's brain. There was a loud crump and Franz staggered back, circuits fizzing and sparking in what was left of its head. At last, the robot realised it was dead and fell into the snow.

'I work alone,' said the Commissar, blowing the smoke from the gun and sliding it into its concealed holster.

The hunter went to find the Doctor, not even bothering to acknowledge the starved soldiers already moving in on the robot's body; ready to strip it to cogs and wires.

Night in the Chateau was a lonely, unnerving experience.

The hollow rooms echoed with the slightest noise. The shadowy statues of its ruler glared from all sides.

Footsteps banged and shuffled and echoed like noisy breezes. Not that the Butler cared; he was too angry for that.

The hulking robot entered the moonlit control room.

Unfamiliar green and red function lights gleamed on the consoles. The Butler didn't like the lights, or the consoles.

The back-up technology units were all over the Chateau and that put him in a bad mood. They made the place look messy.

'What do you want?' he snapped at the Supervisor, who was wired into a skull-dock terminal.

The Supervisor pointed to a computer array. The Butler produced his own elegant skull-dock cable and plugged in. Digits and colours flashed past his eyes at vast speed.

'Do you know how many systems are online at any one time on Planet 1?' said the Supervisor. 'An almost infinite number.'

'And? I do have duties to perform...'

'And with the changeover, virtually impossible to check.'

'Yes yes...'

‘He knew that. Virtually impossible. But it’s not completely impossible. I’ve had two million robots working on it down in South Continent. Over ten thousand prime units have burned out in the process.’

‘Don’t bore me with technical details,’ snapped the Butler. ‘You know I’m on call. What are you talking about?’

‘A manual operator trace: who used which air-screen when.’

The Butler’s mood was improving. It could see where this was leading. ‘Go on...’

‘I’ve back-checked every air-screen operation on Planet 1 during the time period the Doctor transmatted out of the Oroobian Jungle Zone. That command came from an air-screen in this control room. And guess who activated that air-screen?’

If a robot could wet itself, it would have looked something like how the Butler was looking now. ‘You’re kidding?’ it squealed.

‘One hundred per cent sure.’

‘Oh goody,’ said the Butler. They looked at each other.

‘Hurr hurr,’ chuckled the Supervisor.

‘Hurr hurr hurr,’ chuckled the Butler.

‘Hurr hurr hurr hurr,’ they chuckled together.

‘What does a fellow have to do to get some sleep round here?’ demanded the Doctor.

Butler Freddie scooped him out of bed and tucked him under an arm.

Upside down, the Doctor smiled. ‘You look happy. Your lottery number come up?’

Butler Freddie licked its lips. ‘Mm,’ it said. It stomped out of the bedroom.

As the Doctor was carried along various wood-panelled corridors and through a multitude of doors, he presumed the game was up. They must have discovered one of the million loopholes in his disguise. He was unmasked. Had to be. Expected, of course, but not so soon. The Doctor sagged in the robots hands. No point in fighting what he couldn’t do anything about. Better to use this time to think.

At last, they reached a room. The Trophy Room. By now, the Doctor was hanging upside down in Butler Freddie’s hands. A spotlight blinked on.

‘Morning, Baris,’ came Sebastiene’s cheerful voice.

‘Morning!’ yelled the Doctor, equally cheerful. ‘Excuse me for not shaking hands. I’m upside down.’

‘Not to worry,’ said Sebastiene. ‘My Supervisor says he has some news.’

‘How lovely for him. Love a bit of news, me.’

The Doctor was turned right way up and thrown onto the nastily familiar leather couch. A second spotlight flicked on right into his face. ‘Ooh, now I’m thinking: interrogation.’ He raised his hands over his eyes to see who was in here. ‘Would I be right?’

‘You would,’ came the flat tones of Supervisor Freddie from the gloom. ‘You would indeed.’

The Doctor heard a horrible flat noise, like a series of snuffles. ‘Robots laughing,’ he said. ‘Not nice.’

‘You’re a dead man, Baris,’ said Supervisor Freddie.

‘Or whoever you are.’

The Doctor tried to sit up but the flexible cables fired out from the couch and wrapped themselves around him.

‘Sebastiene,’ he said, ‘we’ve been here, done this.’

Sebastiene walked to the couch. He was wearing a very fetching velvet smoking jacket and sipping at a small cup of coffee. ‘Apparently not. My Supervisor believes he has incontrovertible evidence that you were up to something naughty in the control room.’

The Doctor tried to think. What had they had found out? Some discoveries would be worse than others.

Supervisor Freddie loomed into view. Its eyes were big and bulging. It sang: ‘You operated the transmat... you

operated the transmat...’

OK, the Doctor had to admit, that was worse.

The Supervisor took its time. It intended to draw the demonstration out. A 3-D holograph projector took Sebastiene through a very long-winded graphics sequence consisting mainly of how brilliant Supervisor Freddie had been in isolating air-screen operations. The Doctor watched along with the Butler, who was trying to hide its smirk.

Two minutes in, Sebastiene snapped. ‘Can we get to the point?’

‘Yes, my master, of course,’ the Supervisor bowed and put the display into fast-motion.

The holograph fired its way through a coloured light show of fast-moving lines, flashing every time it hit a network point. The whole effect was of a digital bullet, the Supervisor’s detection protocol, streaking along IMT networking nodes towards its inevitable destination. The bullet fired through zones, areas, districts, buildings, rooms into finally into an outline of the Chateau.

‘As you can see,’ said Supervisor Freddie, ‘our tracer narrows down the operation to the Chateau control room.’

The robot looked at the Doctor. It no longer bothered to conceal its triumph. ‘The numbers count down to one very

interesting coordinate. And a very interesting operator.

Because at last we come to the air-screen used to save the Doctor from Lord Percy.'

Despite the cool temperature in the Trophy Room, the Doctor was uncomfortably hot. He lay back, thinking. The Supervisor looked at its master for its final revelation. The digital bullet stopped and flashed red. It had reached its destination.

'And now, after days of fantastic effort from a whole continental mass of dedicated robots, the results are in. This evidence cannot be challenged. After a long and painful series of calculations, the air-screen registration is revealed to be: HGcccc2930-5890.276. Operated...' It paused for effect. 'By Baris.'

The holograph froze, leaving the air-screen number hanging in the air. The Supervisor, as if exhausted by its efforts, dropped its head. It waited for its reward.

The Trophy Room was silent. The Supervisor glanced up, wondering how long before they could get round to harming the Doctor.

The Butler coughed; the sound echoing round the vast empty space.

'You said: HGcccc2930-5890.276?' asked Sebastiene.

'Yes, my master. There can be no possible room for

error.'

'Well,' Sebastiene continued. 'That's not the number on the screen.'

Suddenly, the Supervisor felt very, very sick. It could see what was coming. What it had walked into.

'The number up there is: HGcccc2930-5890.275. And according to your databanks, that particular air-screen was operated by you.'

'I know how he did it, my master, he programmed a trojan to reset the registration if detected... if you would allow me to...'

'Enough!' Sebastiene's voice rang round the Trophy Room. The Supervisor fell silent.

The Supervisor sneaked a look at the Butler but its so-called friend would not meet its gaze. The Doctor was the picture of innocence, wrapped in his cables on the couch. How the Supervisor wanted to pull his arms out. If only it had checked the program for booby traps; a simple operation, easily done. In its rush to tell its master, the Supervisor had failed to keep its discovery safe. And now it was going to pay.

Sebastiene was grinning like a wolf. 'Release Baris.'

The metal cables slid away and the man the Supervisor absolutely knew to be the Doctor sat up.

‘Supervisor, get on the couch,’ said Sebastiene, not raising his voice.

‘C’est la vie,’ said the Doctor. He almost looked sorry.

Knowing he was doomed, the Supervisor obeyed. The Butler was watching him now, worried, but not helping. Not saying anything to stop what must now happen.

The automatic restrainers wound themselves round the robot and pinned it to the couch. It looked up and saw the torture machine dropping down. The implements extended out. The Supervisor knew this machine and understood it was going to enjoy its work.

Sebastiene coughed, hiding a smile. ‘I’ve always wanted to say this.’ He looked sternly at the Supervisor. ‘You know the price of failure,’ and he turned theatrically away.

‘I love you, master,’ said the Supervisor, and meant it. It really did.

A sound like a dentist’s drill started up. The interrogation machine went to work.

Sebastiene put his arm round the Doctor and led him out of the Trophy Room. He shouted over the drill: ‘Let’s get away from all this racket!’

Once outside, the Doctor allowed some of his pent-up tension to release itself as anger. ‘Listen, Sebastiene, that

thing scared the life out of me. I'm only trying to help, and you keep... you keep... my God, what if it had...'

Sebastiene eyed him with amusement. 'Now now, Baris. My Supervisor was only doing its job. You have to expect this kind of thing until we find out what the Doctor is really up to. I mistrust everybody!' He laughed, as if this final sentence was the punch-line of some terrific joke. 'Breakfast!'

'A man as clever as the Doctor has to have some big overarching plan. I'm absolutely convinced. I mean, he's got another ten hunting zones to get through. How is he going to do that? Make up escape routes one at a time? Never do it; not even him. There's a plan. A brilliant plan and you know, Baris, I'm certain that I'm on the brink of understanding it.'

Sebastiene looked up from his plate as the pair again breakfasted in the garden.

'I feel that the answer is on the tip of my tongue.'

Sebastiene scooped out a grapefruit and gobbled down its pulpy contents.

'You mean the answer's staring you in the face?' asked the Doctor, staring Sebastiene in the face.

Sebastiene nodded. 'I don't know how he got to the Supervisor, but he did.'

The Doctor was playing with his food, trying to catch Sebastiene's mood. He was still unsure whether the ruler of Planet 1 was really a psychopathic dandy with terrifying mood swings, or just looked like one.

'Why would the Supervisor drop himself in the soup like that? He seemed convinced I had transmatted the Doctor.'

Sebastiene pinged his spoon on his bowl. 'Oh, Baris, you really are a poor naive fool. The Doctor wants me to know he got to the Supervisor, one of my oldest and most trusted servants.'

'Why would he do that?'

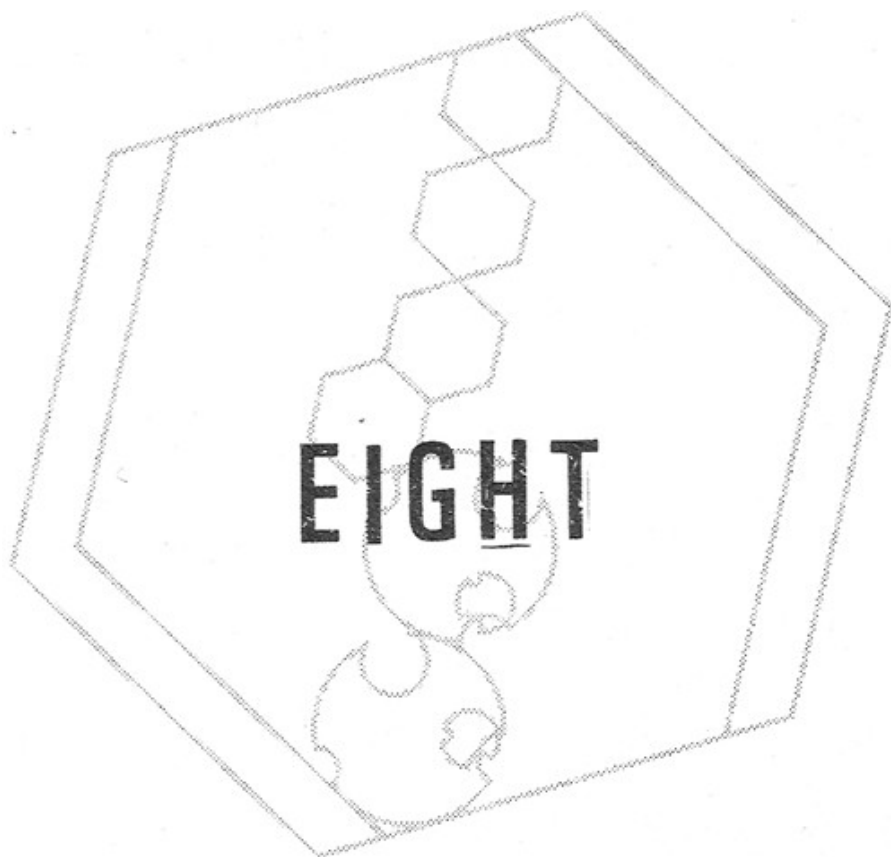
'To rattle me, of course. To make me think he is everywhere. But I've got his measure, oh yes. I've got a little scheme of my own to find out what this big plan really is. Can't fail. No, I'm not going to tell you what it is, Baris. All you need to know is that I shall be going away for a while. Oh, and I've voided your access codes for the computer network. Don't worry; my Butler will log you in whenever you need it. He'll be keeping an eye on you. Oh yes, a very careful eye...'

'Fine,' the Doctor replied. He pushed his plate away, not hungry.

Sebastiene dabbed his chin with a napkin. 'Just to

eliminate you from further suspicion, you understand?

The Doctor is in the Beriagrad Zone with Commissar Weimark, a most efficient and deadly hunter. Let's see him get out of this one.'



Snow began to fall as the weak sun rose over the ruined city. Thick clouds blotted out the red fingers of light that had temporarily brought some cheer to this barren ruin.

Baris was running for his life. Again.

He slipped on hidden ice just as a decaying concrete post by his head burst into fragments. The hunter had found him once more.

Baris whimpered, brushing shards of concrete from his face.

This was the second shot. The first had turned his coat into rags. Baris had been saved only by the sheer amount of clothing he had wrapped around himself. His body was so bulky he looked twice his real size, and the bullet had punctured a non-existent tummy.

He had been in this godforsaken city for two days before the assassin tracked him down. Two days of sleeping in frozen shell holes with rats and rubble for company. All the water was frozen and he had no means to melt it. He was dying of thirst and knew that even with a Time Lord's metabolism he would not last more than another day.

'Dammit!' he yelled and punched the snow. 'Donna needs me!'

Breath held, waiting for the next shot from the killer he couldn't see, Baris forced himself to get up and run.

Commissar Weimark looked up from his telescopic sight.

Without hurry, he ejected the spent cartridge. For a second he thought he had hit the Time Lord but no. The figure crawled into another scar in the city's ragged foundations. Weimark cursed. He had been hoping for a clean kill. His prey's apparent incompetence was deceptive.

Weimark had picked up the Time Lord's trail within hours of starting to look. This ruined city was his helper, every burned-out building and crater as familiar to him as the seams in his cold, slack face.

That morning he had been certain. He was not fooled by a mound of snow and some clumsy rubble. A human shape twitched in its sleep. Weimark could have walked up to the Doctor and cut his throat. The idea was tempting, but somehow Weimark doubted he would succeed that easily. The Doctor's reputation preceded him and there was bound to be a trap; which was why the Commissar decided to shoot him from long range instead, only to end up missing. That was what you got for being cautious.

Now his pride was at stake. Commissar Weimark shouldered his sniper rifle and began to hunt properly. Barely had Butler Freddie logged him onto the Planet 1 network, barely had the Doctor pulled on his VR gloves and goggles, when he realised the game was over. Baris was about to die.

On camera, the Doctor's hapless double slithered down a precarious-looking slope into a crater and attempted to cover himself in snow. Even a child could have found him.

The Doctor stabbed one of the whirling holographic

icons, and the camera angle changed to the hunter's point of view. Commissar Weimark was a dark wraith, flitting with expert grace over rubble and ruin. He reached the top of the crater and settled like a shadow to watch Baris's panicked attempt to hide.

'Ah,' said the Doctor. He watched Weimark watch Baris. Butler Freddie watched him.

After all his clever work to get rid of the Supervisor, basically there was no obvious way of rescuing Baris without being unmasked.

Strike that, there was just no way.

Weimark silently drew the rifle from his back.

The Doctor looked at the floating menu screen for inspiration. The icons shone in coloured letters:

COMMAND,

OPERATIONS,

TRANSPORT,

SECURITY. Which controls were unsecured? Which could he get to?

He had no time at all.

Butler Freddie was transfixed by the image on the screen. 'Nice to be in at the death, eh, Baris?'

Weimark produced a high-explosive rocket grenade,

which he fitted to the end of his rifle. He was going to annihilate the entire crater.

For a second, the Doctor wondered why he should bother. After all, Baris had set him up for this stupid safari. Wasn't this poetic justice? There was no earthly reason to save this ridiculous duplicate.

'Que sera sera,' said the Doctor and touched a virtual command icon. A klaxon screamed out an alarm. The lights turned red. The robots stopped and stared.

'Sabotage!' yelled Butler Freddie. 'Get away from there!'

'Me?' the Doctor replied and pressed another icon. And another six icons.

Butler Freddie literally threw him out of his chair. The gloves and goggles snapped off and flew across the room. Security robots – cruel-looking noblemen with pencil moustaches and white stockings – leaped on top of the Doctor, pinning him to the marble floor.

'What have you done?' screamed Butler Freddie.

'What, little old me?' said the Doctor from under the pile of bodies. 'To be honest, I'm not sure I know myself.'

No good. He was completely spent. Baris came to that realisation as he saw the glint of the hunter's rifle. His pursuer was hiding in the rubble, aiming at him from the

top of the crater. Baris gave up. Let the hunter fire; let him kill. There was no more.

He was the Doctor, and he had to rescue Donna.

Baris twitched. He jumped up. Stones moved and his legs slipped out from beneath him. For a moment he was weightless and then he was tumbling.

In a way he was lucky. Baris dropped eight metres and fell shoulder first into a huge pool of ice, which shattered like a bomb. He dropped under.

The water was deep and unbelievably cold. Freezing mush forced its way down his throat and numbed him completely. Baris rolled over, clenched in a fist of ice.

Cold pressed his head like a band of metal.

Death here would be welcome; an end to the exhaustion of the chase.

He was the Doctor, and he had to rescue Donna.

No, Baris thought. I can't. Not any more. Let me drown. Stars exploded in his eyes. He sensed his hands were gripping an iron railing but he felt nothing.

He was the Doctor, and he had to rescue Donna.

A black cloud spread through his body – suffocation. If he let go of the railing he would drift up into the hunter's gun site. He was finished whatever he did.

The water moved beneath him. Baris opened his

numbed eyes and saw a bright, artificial light. Was this death? The light was moving... until he realised the light was staying still and he was being pulled; down the plug hole, down the drain...

Commissar Weimark stood up. The Doctor had to be dead. Except... that water-filled crater was probably deep enough to stay concealed. If a man could hold his breath; if he could survive the cold...

Weimark knew from experience just how much punishment a body could take. The Doctor could still be alive. Therefore he was.

Weimark began to rush down the side of the crater. For some reason, the water was churning and seemed to be draining away.

He saw a blurred yellow light in the pool. Instinctively, Weimark raised his rifle and fired a high-explosive shell right at it.

The blast was far more powerful than even he expected. Water, concrete, metal and stone erupted in a flash and boom of incredible power. He had hit something, something explosive.

Weimark allowed himself a shout of triumph then looked up. Debris and water from the huge blast dropped like hail around him. The ground under his feet shifted

and, as Baris had before, Weimark skidded. The crater was falling in. He cursed and tried to stay upright. Before he could regain his balance, the Commissar was buried beneath a cascade of rubble.

The security robots pinned the Doctor to a wall.

Butler Freddie glared. 'What did you do?'

'Your wig's got all mussed,' the Doctor replied. 'You should powder it more.'

'Stop this waffle!'

The klaxons ceased. The Control Room was now unnaturally quiet. Skull-docked Freddies twitched frantically.

'Monorail Station Red 552, Beriagrad Zone.

Activated.'

Butler Freddie checked a console. 'You uncloaked a supply monorail junction access nodal...'

'If you mean I opened a door to a hidden train station, you should just say so...' the Doctor looked irritated. 'I hate technobabble.'

Butler Freddie rubbed his moustache. 'The Doctor. You saved him.'

'No I didn't!'

'I saw you!' The robot was so angry that little sparks of electricity were spitting from its mouth. 'You helped the

Doctor escape! Don't deny it!

The Doctor grinned. 'Oh. All right then. But look, I did it for you just as much as for me.'

'In what way for me?'

The Doctor tapped his nose. 'You'll have to take my word for it. Top secret. You need Security Clearance Alpha; yellow, red and ultra-violet level... For your eyes only. And that. Just go about your business.' He began to shout. 'Move along! There's nothing to see!'

Butler Freddie thought this through. He nodded, coming to a decision, and beckoned the two security Freddie's. 'He's lying. Kill him.'

The robots pulled jewel-studded revolvers from ornate belts. They smiled at the Doctor, who raised a finger. 'Ah, now wait just a cotton-picking minute. You know the orders. Remember the Supervisor! You can't kill me...' his voice trailed off and he shifted his eyes to Butler Freddie.

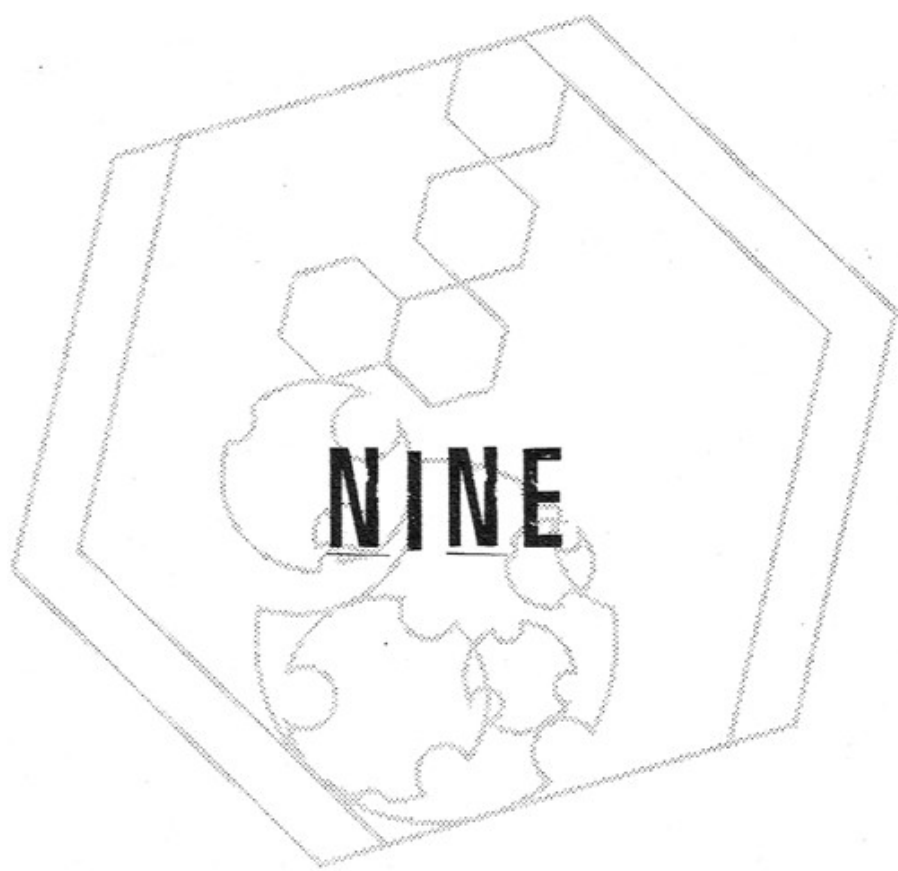
'Can you?'

Butler Freddie was positively smiling. 'Actually, yes I can. Bye-bye.'

The security robots stepped forward.

'Err,' said the Doctor.

The security robots aimed their guns.



‘One word,’ said the Doctor to the robots in front of him. ‘Sebastiene.’

The robotic arms holding the guns twitched.

‘Oh he’s bluffing,’ said Butler Freddie. ‘Kill him.’

There was a pause. Everyone was looking at the Doctor.

Who started to laugh.

Butler Freddie flinched as the laughter roared out. It was a deep bass laugh, a fruity laugh, a rather – if truth be told – unhinged laugh.

‘Bwah ha ha!’ roared the Doctor. ‘He’s got you right

where he wants you. He's playing you like insects on a string instrument.'

He saw Butler Freddie was hooked. It didn't want to be, but it was hooked. The robot waved the guns away and sighed. 'What are you talking about?'

The Doctor wiped his eyes. He shook his head, as if pitying the robots. He looked positively demonic as he said: 'You poor deluded fools. Have you never heard of... the Doctor Trap?'

Donna heard a vehicle drive down the road that led nowhere. At last, someone was coming.

'Doctor,' she said without thinking. Unwanted tears swelled in her eyes.

She had thought she would go mad. Three days she had been here. Three mind-numbing, empty days. Donna had done some boring temp jobs in her life, but the hotel was a new definition of dull.

To cope with the boredom, she had taken to eating.

Whatever else the Exquisite Traveller lacked, there was always plenty of food. Sandwiches, cakes, muffins, chocolate, whatever, whenever.

Once she had ordered, Donna would lie on her bed and stare at the ceiling until she heard the knock on the door. She would get up, open the door and pick up the tray in

the empty corridor. She never saw who delivered the food but she was getting used to that now. The Doctor was running up a painful room service charge. Doubly painful; for when he arrived Donna was going to break his jaw. She was going to get even for sticking her here in this living hell. Oh yes, there was more than one bill to settle. At first she believed the car engine to be another phantom noise, another little devil put here to torment her. However, she couldn't help herself; she got up to look. She swung herself off the bed, noting how heavy her stomach felt. She was already out of breath; how long had it been since she had been on her feet? The ever-present rain streaked down the window.

Tyres squealed on tarmac and scrunched gravel. A handbrake creaked, and the engine stopped. Donna waited. Sticky raspberry jam lined her lips. She didn't want to leave her food dream; she wanted to go back to the nothingness. Best to ignore the sound. Then car doors were slamming, and a young man was shouting, 'Where am I? What is this place?' Donna recognised a tremble in the voice. The tremble of barely controlled hysteria.

'Damn it,' she snapped. She should get back to bed; the sound was a trick. There was nothing to see. Another

phantom noise indeed. More torture.

Donna sagged against the window; cold glass against her face. She moaned.

Then she saw the man. He ran onto the little square of grass between her block and the wing opposite. He was quick and fit and blond, looking around sharply. Looking for a way out.

Good luck, mate, she thought.

Three other men dressed as hotel porters skidded round the corner after him. The hunted man ran to a downstairs windows. He banged his fist on the glass and cursed when it failed to smash.

The three porters were quickly on him. Five minutes later, they bundled him away but not without cost to themselves. The blond man knocked out quite a few porters' teeth before he was overpowered and dragged off.

Donna walked into the bathroom and looked in the mirror. She wiped her mouth and stared her puffy, indolent eyes down. This was no time to lie in bed waiting for the Doctor. She had work to do. She was going to find that young man if it killed her.

There was absolutely no point asking the receptionist. Sadie would be her usual helpful self and end up no help at all. Donna knew she would have to hunt the new

prisoner room by room. They, whoever they were, wouldn't want Donna and him to get together, which was as good a reason as any for trying.

She decided to search the opposite wing. Logically, they would put him as far away from her as they could. Donna ignored the chat and bustle she heard in all the parts of the hotel she wasn't in. Didn't they tire of thinking she was fooled? Were they even bothering to watch her? She crossed the courtyard, into the lobby and walked up the stairs to the first floor of this identical wing. 'Hello?' she called.

'Who's that?' a voice responded. The desperation convinced her. This was for real.

'Me!' she shouted, far too eager. She thought she was falling for another trick when the man walked out of a room and looked at her.

Now Donna considered herself a very good judge of male beauty. This was a subject that had interested her since, well, let's say thirteen...

He was without the doubt the most handsome man she had ever seen. Dare she say it, more handsome even than the Doctor.

Tall, blond and deeply tanned. He was wearing an expensive grey suit which barely hid a body that looked

like it saw six hours gym a day.

‘Oh my,’ she couldn’t help saying.

‘Who are you?’ the man asked. He dropped into an animalistic pose, ready to run or fight. Donna realised she was blushing.

‘I’m... er... Donna, that is. Noble.’

‘Noble?’

‘That’s my name. I think so anyway. Yeah. Sorry.’

The man smiled. ‘Are you all right?’

Donna nodded, feeling foolish.

He looked round. ‘I’m guessing you’re not one of the... well, whoever they are.’

‘No, I’m a prisoner too,’ she replied. ‘Assuming you are... I mean...’

‘Yes, I’m a prisoner. *The* prisoner, you might say. I wasn’t expecting anyone else. Listen, do you know where I might get a cup of tea?’

He was clever. Despite his outward charm, Donna realised the prisoner had given almost nothing away about himself. On the other hand, he knew almost everything about her, including the message from the Doctor.

She was pleased to see he had no fear of Sadie or any of the other so-called staff. Once in reception he had winked at Donna then bellowed for tea and cake.

Immediately! He then sat down in the biggest, comfiest sofa right in the middle of the lobby. Donna followed his example, giggling.

For the first time ever, she saw Sadie scowl, and that cheered Donna up considerably. The receptionist skulked off to the kitchen and returned with a tray brimming with tea pots, milk and muffins.

‘Careful with that,’ the prisoner ordered, just as Sadie was lowering the tray.

‘Yes, sir,’ replied the receptionist, much too brightly. She smiled and tottered back behind the reception desk and the safety of her office.

‘Might as well enjoy ourselves while we’re here,’ said the prisoner.

‘Why not?’ Donna said back.

‘So you’re a friend of the Doctor?’

‘I’m sorry,’ she said, ‘but I don’t even know your name.’

The prisoner laughed. ‘Sorry. Pleased to meet you, Donna. I’m Sebastiene.’

Concrete shifted. The patrol sergeant noted the movement out of the corner of his eye. He waved his hand and his squad dived for cover.

Of course, this wasn’t really Beriagrad, and the patrol

sergeant and his squad weren't real soldiers. They just thought they were. The moving concrete was real though. Sergeant Laki had heard the blast ten minutes ago. At first he had taken it for another downed aircraft. When you had been in Beriagrad as long as he was programmed to believe he had, you got able to identify what had blown up by the type of explosion it made. Helped to tell the difference between a wreck from which you could salvage food and ammunition and one that was going to machine gun you down.

When he looked, Laki saw a hole at the bottom of the crater that looked like no other hole he had ever seen. The hole was large and perfectly square and pouring out smoke.

Laki whistled and his ragged squad of two men and two women began a careful descent over the loose debris. Falling snow was covering their tracks as they closed in on the hole. They were just getting to it when the concrete shifted.

Laki reasoned that someone had got themselves buried. Maybe it was an enemy. One of the few perks of Beriagrad was finding a helpless Western soldier to play with. Gave you something to do to take your mind off the horror. Bit of fun.

The concrete moved again. Laki waved at one of his soldiers to take a look. Could be a booby trap – the Westerns were cunning – and the sergeant wasn't going to be the one who did the poking around.

With understandable reluctance, the nominated private sneaked up to the rubble. She held her rifle out bayonet first and jabbed the concrete. She stepped back.

‘Again,’ said Laki.

Swallowing, the private obeyed.

The rubble erupted. A dusty white arm grabbed the private's rifle. Instinctively, she stepped back and pulled.

Another arm appeared, this one holding a pistol. The pistol roared and the robot soldier collapsed. The report of the weapon echoed across the snowy crater.

Laki's squad dropped to their knees and aimed. A man emerged from the rubble. His face was gaunt, white and expressionless.

The ghost man pointed his smoking pistol straight at the sergeant. Dark, expressionless eyes gazed into his. ‘Go on,’ said the ghost. ‘Shoot.’

Laki made a strangled sound in his throat, realising his squad was aiming rifles at the Eastern Marks' most senior political officer.

‘Where is the Doctor?’ asked Commissar Weimark.

‘W-who?’

Weimark holstered his pistol, dusted himself down and stared down at the ruined entrance. ‘An exit point.’

Weimark paused for thought. ‘The Doctor was allowed to escape. Sebastiene cheated. Very well. Sergeant, bring your squad. We’re going after him.’

Surprised but compliant, Laki did as he was told.

‘So what you’re saying,’ said Butler Freddie, ‘is that getting killed is all part of the Doctor’s plan.’

‘The Doctor Trap,’ said the Doctor. ‘Exactly.’

For want of anywhere better, Butler Freddie had brought the Doctor to the conference room, with its mahogany table. The TARDIS stood in the shadows, as if placed there to taunt the Time Lord.

The robot was agitated, and the Doctor felt it his duty to make it feel worse. He poured tea and milk into one of Sebastiene’s priceless cups and stirred vigorously. The room rang with the annoying metallic chink.

Butler Freddie’s moustache quivered. ‘I don’t understand.’

‘Of course you don’t. That’s the whole point.’

‘And you’re saying Lord Sebastiene knows about this Doctor Trap?’

The Doctor gave Butler Freddie a look. ‘Der! He’s the

one who told me about it! Why do you think he let me de-cloak the monorail station?’

Butler Freddie wanted him dead, it really did. ‘Look...’ it spluttered, trying to find a loophole in the story, ‘there’s... it’s...’

‘Listen, robot. As soon as the Doctor is killed, the trap is going to spring. Then we’re all in trouble: me, you and especially Sebastiene. Why do you think he keeps being caught so easily? Being caught and killed is exactly what the Doctor wants. It’s logic. You see?’

‘No.’

‘This is way beyond your little megatronic brain. It’s to do with squishy human stuff. Ask Sebastiene when he gets back. I don’t mind.’

Butler Freddie nodded. ‘I will. You can be sure of that.’

The Doctor swallowed his tea. ‘Where’s he gone anyway?’ he asked. ‘Just asking.’

‘I don’t know. And even if I did, I wouldn’t tell you.’

Putting his cup back on the silver tray, the Doctor leaped up. ‘Anyway, time’s a wasting. I’m sure you’ve got all sorts of robotic butler duties to be getting on with. And I’ve got a fiendish Doctor Trap to unravel, so...’

‘Wait,’ said Butler Freddie.

The Doctor slumped. ‘What now?’

Butler Freddie stood. Dark eyes glared. It was thinking things through.

No, thought the Doctor with regret, this one isn't as stupid as it looks.

'If the Doctor is killed, he is dead,' said the Butler, slowly. 'What sort of trap is that?'

The Doctor smiled yet again. 'My friend. It isn't my place to call you stupid. You're a robot, it isn't your fault.'

'Explain it then. How can the Doctor want to die?'

'Haven't you worked it out yet? Whoever is out there isn't the Doctor.'

The afternoon passed quickly in a blissful haze of tea and chat. Sebastiene was charming and handsome and his story was ever so tragic.

'I created this world. Well, I fashioned it anyway.

Planet 1. My home.'

Donna smiled. 'I knew this couldn't be Bracknell. So how come you're trapped with me, then? And how do you know the Doctor?'

'Everyone knows the Doctor. I was in trouble. I sent a message asking him for help. Which is I guess why you're here. I am afraid this is going to get complicated.'

Donna looked around. Muzak was creeping round the lobby; glitzy and tatty like Christmas decorations left up

too long. Donna felt if she heard the Sugababes one more time she would scream. ‘Anything that stops me remembering I’m here is fine.’

‘Please don’t blame me for this place,’ said Sebastiene.

‘The planetary terraforming circuits have a telepathic quality. They use your emotional secretions to model an analogue environment.’

‘Uh?’

Sebastiene smiled. ‘Don’t worry; I don’t understand how it works either.’

‘I thought you said you run Planet 1.’

‘No, Planet 1 runs Planet 1. I’m more like a... an ideas man. A consultant. When I arrived, all the machinery was already in place. I just figured out how to use it. Use it, but not understand it.’

‘Sounds like me and Microsoft Excel.’

‘Mm?’

‘Don’t worry,’ said Donna. ‘So where are you from originally?’

Sebastiene stood up and stretched. ‘Would you believe: Earth?’

Donna realised she had stopped breathing. Sebastiene’s stretch was about the most graceful and attractive male movement she had ever witnessed.

‘Earth 1973, to be exact,’ he was saying. ‘I was a scientist. Well, a student. I was only twenty, a not very brilliant undergraduate at Cambridge completely out of his depth. I volunteered for this little project. There was this weird meteorite that they wanted investigating. I was to sit in a lab and squint into an electron microscope and wait for it to do something. What that might be they never told me. If anything did happen, I was supposed to run and tell the experts. Eventually, something did happen. There was a blinding flash and suddenly here I was, lying in the dust of an alien planet.’

‘How?’

‘Do you really want to hear the theories? I’ve spent a long time on them.’

‘I’m guessing I don’t.’

‘You’re right. Anyway, here I was – a million light years from where I was supposed to be. For a while I just panicked. The sky was different, all purple and no Moon. There was only desert and these strange metallic formations, like gigantic radio antennae. Only they weren’t radio-wave receivers. They were thought-wave receivers. Specifically, my thoughts.’

‘How did they get there?’ asked Donna. ‘Who built them?’

‘I don’t know. The old long-dead civilisation story, I expect. I remember thinking, if I had to be transported somewhere, why couldn’t it be a tropical beach in Mauritius? Next thing I knew, there I was: on a beach: white sand, clear sea, sunshine.’

‘The antenna things had picked up on that.’

‘Right,’ said Sebastiene. ‘And from then on it was just a matter of working out how this massive powerhouse of a planet worked. You may have noticed this physique, this face?’

Donna could feel herself blushing. ‘Not really. Well, all right. Yes.’

Sebastiene smiled, his perfect teeth flashing in the low light. ‘I made it myself. You don’t want to know my original appearance. Let’s just say: science geek multiplied by a thousand.’

He looked at the reception desk. Sadie had come out of hiding and was watching them. Her jewelled fingers were scratching at the counter, tearing up brochures. She didn’t seem to know she was doing it.

‘I rather think we’ve run out of time,’ said Sebastiene.

‘Wait,’ Donna snapped. ‘How did it go wrong? How come you lost it all?’

Sebastiene smiled. ‘Someone came, stole my identity

and took it all off me.'

'Who?'

'I don't know. But now he also calls himself Sebastiene... and he looks like me. That's why I put out the emergency distress call. I hoped the Doctor would pick it up and find me. The situation here is desperate. This imposter may well have fooled the Doctor into thinking he's me. Planet 1 has become dangerous.'

Through the windows, Donna saw the male porters standing outside in the rain, not moving. Not for the first time, Donna noted how smooth and expressionless their faces were. 'When did they get here?' she asked. 'Who are they?'

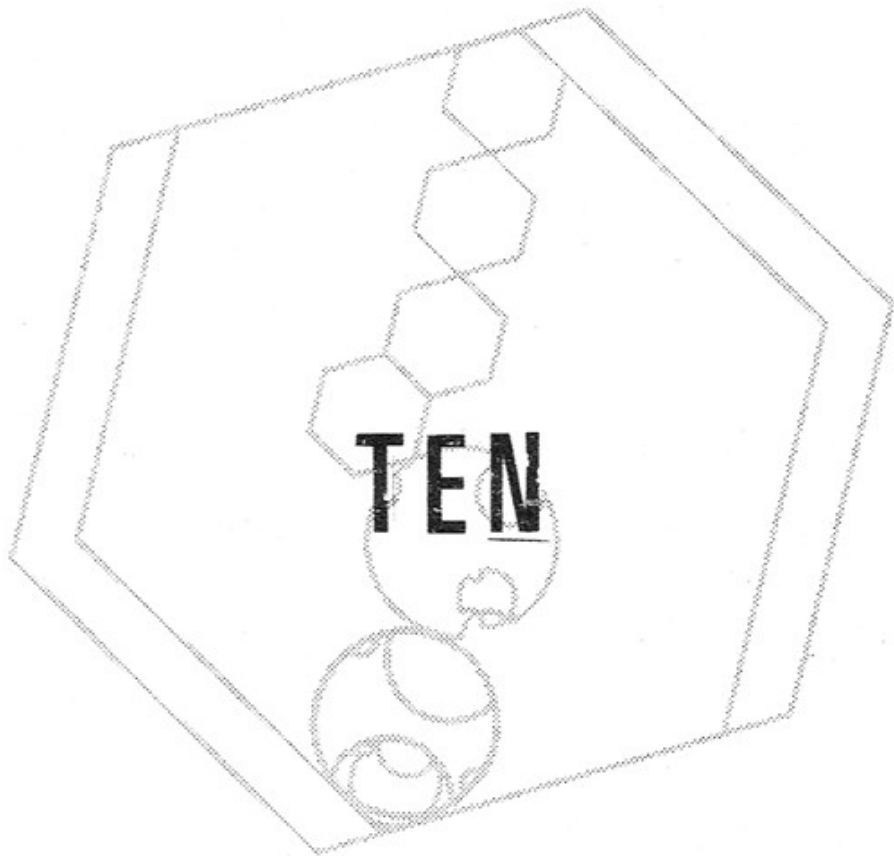
'Androids,' said Sebastiene. 'Constructs. His.'

Donna stood up. She looked around then picked up a padded chair. 'If they're androids,' she said, 'we should fight our way out.' She raised the chair. It was heavy enough to do a good job.

'We can't,' Sebastiene replied. 'This hotel is a molecular bonded micro-zone. There is no way out.'

'There has to be a solution.'

'Yes,' said Sebastiene. 'Someone must rescue us.'



The water poured down the station steps and dumped Baris onto a simple underground platform. Luckily for him, a train had pulled in. The train was a long featureless piece of metal: bronze and smooth like a section of pipe. Baris slammed into its side. The water spread in a thin gruel across the platform.

Battered and exhausted, shocked and in agony, Baris scrabbled for a handhold. He barely knew what he was doing; a primitive instinct for survival all that functioned in his bruised, frozen, soaked brain. 'What more...' he moaned. 'What next?'

The train trundled forward, picking up speed. Baris scabbled at its smooth sides. If he stayed on the platform, he was a dead man. This was his only chance. He saw a bump in the smooth metal some way down the train's side. A handle heading his way. Had to be.

Baris instinctively grabbed the handle. The train sped up. He closed his eyes and started to run. 'Open the door!' he yelled. 'Open the door!'

Aware that the platform was about to run out, he tried to let go. His hand, however, seemed clamped to the hull. 'Don't let me die,' he pleaded, 'don't let me die...'

He felt a force grip him, like gravity or magnetism or something, and he was swept up and pressed hard against the metal side.

Then he was in darkness, travelling at a speed he knew should have been impossible to survive. He should have

been torn from the handle and hurled back down the track. The train hissed up and down through tunnel after tunnel, turning unbelievable angles and once even leaving the monorail track altogether and dropping down into a lower tunnel. Baris felt very sick but he knew better than to let go.

Finally, there was light again and the train slowed and gravity suddenly gripped his body. He weighed a ton. His arms couldn't hold on any more. With a yell, he fell.

Onto another platform.

Baris lay spread-eagled. He couldn't move. He had been chased without respite from one end of this planet to the other. Wherever he had ended up would have to wait. Even his need to find Donna would have to wait. This floor was hard but safe. The train whooshed off.

A long time later, Baris looked up to see a long metal bench lining an empty platform. Hardly able to walk, he crawled to the bench, lay down and fell asleep.

'Curse him!' bellowed Commissar Weimark. 'He has the luck of the Western devil.'

The featureless train had left the station with the Doctor clinging to its side. Weimark stared down the tunnel. He needed to think.

'What is this place?' said the sergeant. 'I've never seen

anything like it.’ The android soldiers ran their hands across the smoothly bored platform walls.

‘Yes you have,’ Weimark replied. ‘You were probably delivered here.’

Ignoring Laki’s puzzled expression, Weimark tried to think how he should proceed. ‘The Doctor must have known about the station. This is treachery.’

Unfortunately, this realisation did not help him catch the Time Lord. He could hardly walk down the tunnel after his quarry. Not with 500-kilometre-an-hour trains coming up behind.

‘We should get back to the city,’ said one of the soldiers. ‘This is a bad place.’

‘That’s right,’ said the sergeant. ‘Commissar, we should go.’

Their programming, Weimark realised. They would react in this way to any breach of the Beriagrad protocol. Anything the squad could not understand they would avoid. He had to make them understand. He would need these robots.

‘I am afraid not,’ he told them. ‘Sergeant. This is a Western Mark transportation tunnel. We have been aware of them for some time but chose not to tell the common soldier. We wished to maintain the pretence of ignorance.

The enemy was not to be alerted. Until the final victorious assault, of course. You understand?’

The sergeant’s neck clicked strangely. The robot was making up its small mind. ‘Yes, Commissar,’ it said. ‘A Western Mark transportation tunnel.’

‘Consider yourself under my command. We have work to do. You will discuss this mission with no one. You will not ask questions. Just follow my orders.’

‘Yes, Commissar.’

Weimark heard a hissing noise. A new train was arriving. Apparently driverless, it sidled up to the platform and stopped. The Commissar nodded at the vehicle. ‘We must follow the Doctor.’

‘The doors do not open,’ said one of the privates. ‘How do we get onto the train?’

Weimark raised his rifle and fired an armour piercing round into the side. The metal burst inwards. The gunshot echoed down the tunnel, getting fainter as it travelled.

‘We use our initiative,’ he said. ‘Get on.’

‘I love you, my master,’ said the Butler on the TV screen.

‘Please don’t be angry.’

‘Yeah, all right,’ Sebastiene replied. ‘Let’s not get gooey.’

The Butler looked almost mournful. Sebastiene was

touched; well he would have been if he hadn't known he had programmed the robot to act that way.

'Baris?' asked Sebastiene.

'I'm not clever enough for him.'

Sebastiene leaned back on his bed. 'You're worried about this "Doctor Trap".'

'That's right,' said the Butler. 'I've thought and thought but I just can't understand how it might work. Now the Doctor's disappeared into the monorail network. He could be anywhere. I think this whole Doctor Trap is just a pack of lies.'

Sebastiene sneered at the screen. 'You idiot. That's just what he wants you to think. Of course there's a Doctor Trap. A fiendishly clever trap. He's not the Doctor for nothing.'

'I don't trust Baris.'

'I don't trust anyone,' Sebastiene replied. 'That's why I'm here instead of there. You think I'm on holiday? You think I want Baris running round the Chateau poking his nose in? Look, if it makes you feel better, be assured Baris will not leave Planet 1 alive.'

The Butler smiled. 'Yes, that makes me feel a lot better. Thank you, my master.'

'But until I get back, you give him enough rope.'

Sebastiene reached to turn the screen off.

‘To hang himself?’ asked the Butler brightly.

Sebastiene sagged. ‘You robots really know how to ruin the moment, don’t you. Yes: enough rope to hang himself. Oh... go away.’

He had no idea how long he had been asleep. Time had lost its meaning here in this monorail station. Baris guessed some days had passed. Any relief he’d had from escaping his hunters had long worn off. He needed food, badly.

He had found water, if you could call it that.

Condensation formed on metal handrails and doors and although it kept him alive, the liquid tasted foul.

He had tried all the potential exits, all the ways to escape. The platform was essentially a slightly wider part of the tunnel with lights and somewhere to sit. No doors, no ladders.

Baris had thought about grabbing the handle on another train as it passed through but he knew he lacked the courage. He had been lucky once with that tactic. Never again. He was marooned, as surely as on a desert island.

At some point, he was going to have to go into the tunnel. He was going to have to try and walk out. If he did that, which would happen when he could no longer stand

the hunger, a train was going to come along and flatten him.

He tried to think back. After all, he had plenty of time for reflection. As the Doctor, surely he could expect to remember a past adventure in which he had escaped a similar situation. No memories came. His past was a complete blank.

Well, not complete. For some reason, he was remembering a totally different life. He could picture a small housing unit in a conurbation in a sprawling city. He could remember sitting in a dark, square bedroom. He remembered being plugged into an i-Dock, scouring the Galactic Neural Net. He remembered linking to other minds and searching for information. Searching for news. News, scraps of information, anything that would numb the tedium of his everyday boredom.

Where were his real memories? Where was Rose? He knew the name but couldn't put a face to her. He knew they had fought Daleks and Cybermen and even met her family but he didn't have any emotional attachment to that knowledge. How could he have forgotten Rose?

He lay on the bench and tried to relax. Hunger did not make that attempt difficult. As he closed his eyes, Baris felt this new memory rising to block out those other

memories. No, not blocking; superimposing. A face: his own. The face looked at him and spoke. 'You are the Doctor,' it said. 'Donna is in trouble. You must find her.' The voice grew louder and louder until he couldn't hear or see those initial memories at all. His own voice? His subconscious encouraging him to resist?

Baris thought about what had happened to his mind. He thought and thought until finally he thought he knew what was going on in there. Someone had implanted false memories. Maybe they used the i-Dock to do it. Someone was trying to convince him he was someone else.

Someone wanted him to think he wasn't the Doctor.

Baris sat up. Well, he wasn't going to let them.

However they attacked his mind he would resist.

'Time to go, Doctor,' he said. He would get down that tunnel and no, a train wouldn't come along and flatten him. He refused to allow that possibility.

He heard a familiar whooshing sound and, as if to test his new determination straight away, a monorail train slid into the station. If he followed the train out, he would probably have some time before the next one turned up. If he was lucky.

Only this train was different from the others. This train stopped. The metal segments wheezed and groaned as

they cooled. Steam bled from its joints. A door towards the front fizzed with discharged static electricity and hissed open.

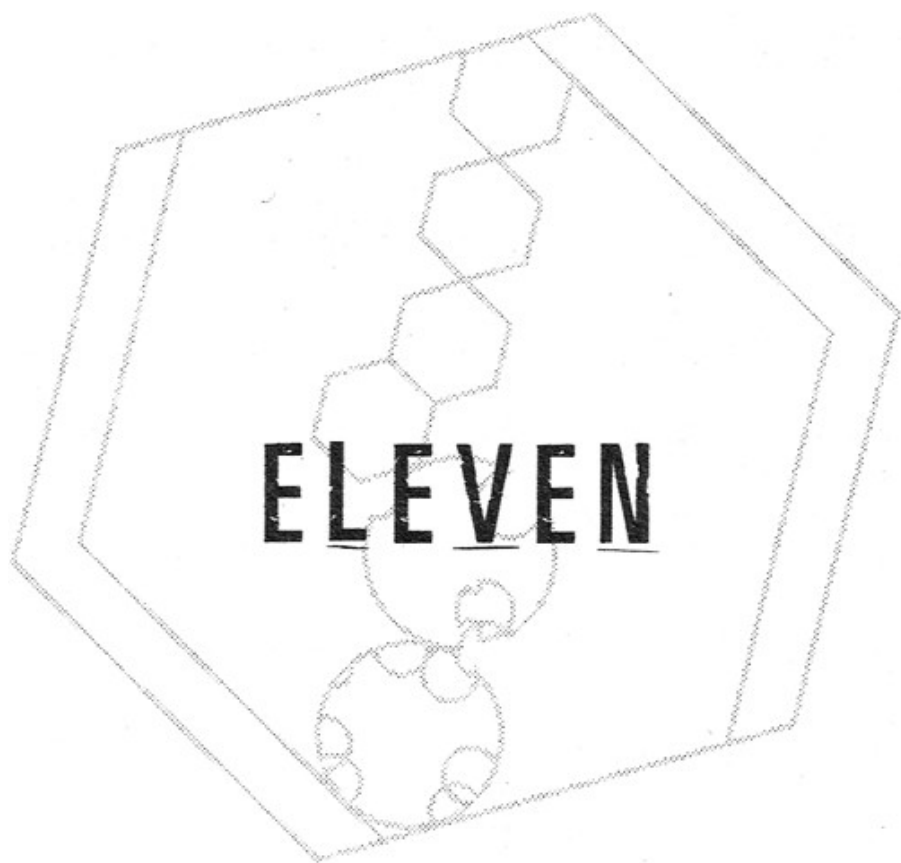
Baris looked around for cover. There was none.

Whatever was hiding behind that smooth bronze door was going to step onto the platform and catch him in the open.

No one came out.

The train sat panting, like a dog waiting for its master.

Baris smelled cooked food. He did not need to think twice; he ran for the open door.



They were beating Sebastiene. Donna would wait

outside his door, which she couldn't break down no matter how hard she thumped. The sounds from within, the muffled cries and the thuds, the mumbled questions and the defiant replies, left her in tears.

When the sessions ended, when they had had enough, the door would click open and Sebastiene would stagger out. Donna would help him down to the lobby, their nest. Practised now, she dabbed his bruised face with cotton wool and water scrounged from the Exquisite Traveller's meagre first-aid box. Every day he took longer to recover. 'Why are they doing this?' she asked.

'They like it,' he said back.

'There must be a reason. There has to be.'

Sebastiene winced and held his jaw. 'It's the other Sebastiene. He comes in with his pals, works me over and leaves.'

'Where?' She tried not to sound hopeful. 'I mean, if they've got a secret exit we could—'

'Forget it,' said Sebastiene. 'They're using the transmat. I thought I had arranged it to be switched off but —'

'If we got hold of this man. If I got in the room, put a gun to his head, held him hostage...'

Sebastiene smiled. 'It's a nice idea, but there's a reason

you can't get that door open, Donna. There's a molecular seal. You couldn't break it down in a million years. But I admire your imagination.'

Donna dropped her cotton wool into the bowl. The water was red now. 'That's the best I can do, Sebastiene. I'm sorry.'

He sat up, wincing as he did so. 'Listen, you're terrific.'

'I don't understand why they're beating you up. If they wanted to kill you, wouldn't they have done it by now?' She didn't wait for an answer. 'Why bother to send you here to meet me? They must want something.'

She looked at him. He looked at her. They both spoke at once. 'The Doctor.'

That afternoon, Sebastiene decided to take a walk round the grounds. 'Sod the rain,' he said. 'Let it fall.' And for the first time in what seemed like for ever, Donna laughed. Sadie watched from the reception desk as they linked arms and stood in the doorway.

'We're off,' said Sebastiene. 'We're taking a constitutional.'

'A perambulation,' said Donna.

'A walk!'

Sadie smiled. 'Have a nice time,' she said.

‘Oh Sadie, while we’re out...’

‘Yes, Sebastiene?’

‘Don’t forget to kill yourself. A really excruciating and hideous death would be ideal.’ He smiled back.

‘Have a nice day,’ said Sadie again, without changing her expression.

‘Why do they want the Doctor?’ asked Donna. ‘And why don’t they have a go at me?’

They had reached the road’s first pointless turn. From here they would be walking in an endless loop. All roads led to the Exquisite Traveller.

Sebastiene shrugged. ‘Good question.’

‘They must ask you something.’

‘I think he’s worried. Afraid, even. The Doctor has done something to him.’

‘That sounds familiar.’

‘No, I mean really afraid. Is he really as terrifying as the stories say?’

Donna remembered her first encounter with the Doctor. When she had been supposed to be getting married. She remembered what she said when he asked her to join him. ‘I told him once he needed someone to stop him.’ She looked at Sebastiene. ‘Yeah, he is that terrifying. Your invader bloke is right to be worried.’

‘You care about the Doctor very greatly, don’t you?’

Donna nodded. She hadn’t pressed that sore point for a while.

‘Sometimes I don’t want to,’ she said. ‘Sometimes I wish I didn’t feel for him. He is big and he is scary, and I shouldn’t let the way he messes about and pretends to be a big kid fool me. But I do.’

‘Why? I mean, if you know he’s trying to fool you?’

‘Because I like it. And that’s part of the Scary. I don’t like what he brings out in me.’

Sebastiene chuckled. The chuckle turned into a cough as the wounds kicked in. Donna held him up as he stumbled. ‘You shouldn’t laugh,’ she scolded.

‘I can’t help it,’ he replied. ‘What you say about the Doctor. It sounds just like what I thought about Planet 1 when I first figured the place out.’

‘Uh?’

‘Without any effort, I just suddenly had access to massive power. Just me: an ordinary man from Bexley. I could change my physical structure. I could alter the geography of an entire planet. I could, quite literally, create matter out of thin air. Yes, you could say I didn’t like what it brought out in me. What was possible in my life had changed. Big time.’

Donna thought about this for a while. ‘That’s it. With the Doctor... I feel I could get anything I want. But it’s not quite like that.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘He’s... just good. I mean, he can be mischievous and annoying. But he’s good.’ Donna sensed her face glowing red. ‘Good in that if there’s bad, he fights it. And this bloke that’s forced you out, well anyone who can give out a beating like he gives you, he has to be bad. If Planet 1 can give what you want, the Doctor’s job is to get you to work out what’s worth wanting.’

She squeezed Sebastiene’s hand. ‘Which is why I have faith. The Doctor will find us.’

The beatings continued. Donna was beginning to believe that this other Sebastiene, the imposter, just hit the real one because he liked it.

Her helplessness in the face of the violence was the real torture. She pounded on the door but no one ever answered. They took not a blind bit of notice. Just those same old rumbling voices and the barked questions.

They were going to kill him.

When he came out, she dressed his wounds. Every time. Sebastiene remained chirpy, never giving in, but he was fading away. Each time, he took longer to recover. He

also had information.

Sebastiene lay on a sofa in the reception. The wounds were starting to look permanent. He needed serious medical attention and fast.

Donna listened as he croaked out what he had learned.

‘The Doctor is loose,’ he said. ‘He has escaped and is out and about somewhere on Planet 1. From the level and intensity of his anger,’ and here Sebastiene rubbed his jaw, ‘I think the imposter has messed up. He totally underestimated the Doctor.’

‘He wouldn’t be the first,’ said Donna. ‘But don’t you get it? The Doctor is coming for us. He has to have a plan.’

‘That’s what I thought.’ Sebastiene looked at her with those heavily lidded eyes. ‘Are we talking about the Doctor Trap?’

Because of that, because of what he said, Donna realised what was going on.

She felt like she had just woken up. Anger flared up inside her, a quick intense burst of real wild rage. She felt like blasting off, lashing out.

However, she was learning. If the Doctor had taught her anything, it was that she could focus her anger and use it as a weapon. Much more destructive. Let’s hold back a

little, she thought. Let's wait.

'Are you all right, Donna?' asked Sebastiene. 'You've gone a funny colour.'

'What do you know about the Doctor Trap?' she asked in a shifty little voice. Like he had just said some magic words.

Beneath his wounded-soldier act he was all smug relaxation and ease. 'Almost nothing,' he said sincerely. 'Just the words. When they beat me, that's all they keep asking. What is the Doctor Trap?'

'If they're beating you to find out what it is, wouldn't it be better if I didn't tell you?'

Sebastiene leaned to the teapot, as if to pour himself another cup. Donna tried not to smile.

'Hmm,' he said.

'No, it's probably better if I tell you what the Doctor Trap is,' she said.

He stopped squirming. Immediately. 'So there is one?'

'It might get us out of here, mightn't it?' She smiled her dumbest smile. 'It might help?'

'If you're sure,' he replied, trying to catch her mood.

Donna looked around, cagey. Her voice dropped to a whisper.

'When I first met the Doctor, I was going to get

married, see? To this bloke I really liked, called Lance.

You with me?’

Sebastiene nodded.

‘Lance spent ages chatting me up, being my mate. We got on really well. Whenever I needed a shoulder to cry on, there was good old Lance. He seemed too good to be true. He told me he loved me, yeah, and that we should get married. Only thing was, the Doctor turned up and worked out that all the time Lance had been playing this game with me, tricking me, using me. Why don’t you pour the tea, Sebastiene?’

Sebastiene seemed to be struggling. He was squirming again. ‘Yes, sure.’ He sat up and fiddled with the teapot.

‘This... oh what’s the word for my lovely Lance... oh yeah: scumbag. Well, he was being manipulated by someone smarter than him, promising him all sorts of anything, and he fell for it. Like an idiot, you know what I mean? You all right there, Sebastiene? Hasn’t gone cold, has it?’

He gave her a wan smile. ‘Cold? I don’t understand.’

‘The tea, Sebastiene, the tea. So ever since then I’ve learned to become just a little bit suspicious of pretty young boys who think Donna’s a bit desperate and a bit thick, and they can do what they want with her. Not being

rude am I?’

‘Donna, what are you saying?’ said Sebastiene. ‘You’re wrong, listen. They tortured me... in there...’

Donna put on her mock-offended look. ‘Thinking they can mess me about so they can find out what the Doctor’s up to. What’s up, Sebastiene? Ain’t we friends any more?’ Only now did Donna realise her voice had been getting louder.

Sebastiene stopped playing with the tea service and sat back on his sofa. They stared at each other. For the first time, Donna could see what was really going on in Sebastiene’s mind. He wasn’t used to being sussed out, and he wasn’t doing a very good job of hiding it.

Sebastiene hurled the tea tray off the table then returned to stare again. In the distance, Donna saw Sadie step back. The receptionist was frightened.

‘Why don’t you shut up?’ he whispered.

She refused to be cowed. The best way to handle bullies was to give it back to them. She hoped.

Donna stood and put her hands on her hips. ‘I’m gonna tell you exactly what the Doctor Trap is. You want to know? Do you really want to know? Do you?’

‘Just tell me,’ he snarled. ‘Tell me what the Doctor Trap is.’

‘It’s a warning, for me to avoid you.’

‘That’s not a trap.’

‘Yes it is. It’s a trap for you. He wanted you to ask me about the Doctor Trap, so when you said those specific words to me, I would know you were a scumbag too.’

Donna laughed. ‘The Doctor, he’s brilliant, he is.’

She had him. All he could do was sit and stare. ‘I’m right,’ she said. ‘I am, aren’t I?’

Sebastiene smiled and, for the first time since she had met him, Donna was frightened. She realised he probably wasn’t a very good loser. In fact, he was actually insane. Very calmly, he said: ‘You know I could kill you instantly. It would be so easy.’

‘Shut up, I’m sick of listening to you.’

He walked towards the exit. ‘Enjoy the rest of your life Donna,’ he said. ‘I’ll send someone for you. Soon.’

‘Get back here!’ Donna snapped. She didn’t want to be left alone, not again, but she was damned if she was going to let him know that.

Sebastiene waved an idle hand goodbye and walked into the rain. Donna stared after him. She stared for a long time, afraid to let her anger go, afraid generally.

With that smug, error-free brain process called hindsight, Donna worked out she probably could have played that

situation better.

Donna paced the hotel waiting for something nasty to happen. When nothing did, she wondered whether the waiting was the vengeance. Perhaps he had just left her there to rot.

She started to feel sleepy. Really sleepy. Funny what stress could do to the mind. She felt she ought to be making plans for whoever he would send, but she just couldn't summon the energy. She tried eating, but even that didn't work. In the end, she just went to bed.

Delayed shock, she guessed, as she lay back and stared at the ceiling. Must be why she was so tired. Bit of sleep and she would be as right as rain. Yeah, bit of sleep, and if the Doctor finally actually turned up, she would be ready. Donna wondered what the Doctor was doing right now. Her last thought was that the one thing he definitely would not be doing was being asleep.

The lights snapped on. Butler Freddie scooped him out of bed again.

The Doctor struggled in its grip. 'Oh come on,' he said. 'You cannot be serious.'

There was an urgency in Butler Freddie's stride as he marched the familiar route to the Trophy Room. Uh oh, thought the Doctor.

Once again, Sebastiene was waiting for him. Only this time he was angry.

Uh Oh Chongo. Danger Island...

The Butler threw the Doctor onto the couch. The intelligent harnesses snaked their way around his body.

‘There’s no need for this,’ the Doctor insisted. He squinted at Sebastiene’s face. ‘Have you been in a fight?’

Sebastiene stood in a pool of light. He seemed only half-aware of the Doctor’s presence. He was dressed in a torn suit, a rather fetching torn suit actually that made him look very cute and vulnerable. ‘Like it,’ said the Doctor.

‘The whistle. Goes well with those bruises on your face. Who did that?’

‘Stop your infantile prattling,’ Sebastiene snapped. ‘I’m sick of the sound of you.’ In the background, Butler Freddie giggled.

He pressed a button, and a giant LCD screen dropped into view. Sebastiene waved a hand and his face rippled. The bruises on his face began to fade. Within seconds, they had all gone.

‘Clever,’ said the Doctor. ‘Look, what have I done?’ He was desperate to figure out what they had found out about him. ‘The Butler’s been telling tales, hasn’t he?’

Sebastiene wiped his face with a towel and, for the first

time, the Doctor saw the extent of his rage.

The screen flickered into life. It revealed a small, featureless hotel room. The curtains were drawn, and a feeble light turned everything inside grey. A body lay on the bed, immobile.

‘Donna Noble,’ said Sebastiene, spitting the words out.

‘The feisty, strong Miss Donna Noble.’

Donna. The one sure trump card Sebastiene held to get him. The Doctor bit his lip.

‘I want the truth, Baris,’ said Sebastiene. ‘I know you’ve been lying to me and it stops here. Who are you? Really?’

The Doctor tried flim-flam; for old times’ sake. ‘My master, I don’t know what you mean. I’m...’

Sebastiene raised a finger. ‘Just to let you know, I’ve turned off the oxygen supply for Miss Noble’s little domain. She is breathing the last of what remains.

Already, she is unconscious. Planet 1 informs me that she will die of asphyxiation in somewhere between six and twelve minutes. Of course, brain damage will occur much sooner than that.’

The Doctor struggled in his bonds. ‘She’s done nothing to you. Let her go.’

‘I know you covet her, Baris, or whoever you are.

You've been trying to find her since you arrived. So if you want her you're going to have to tell me who you really are.'

'Oh, master,' said Butler Freddie. 'I knew you were clever. You're cleverer than... the world. You see that girl.' He tapped the Doctor. 'She's going to die.'

'Sebastiene!' the Doctor snapped. 'I'm warning you: let Donna go.'

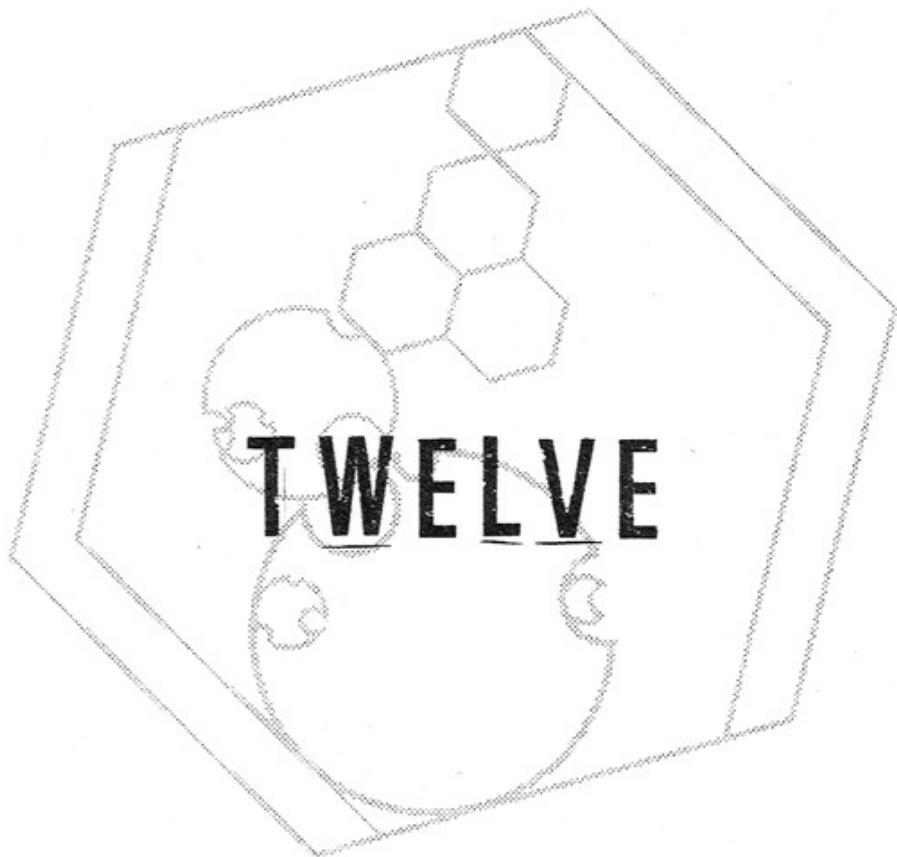
'Warning me?' said Sebastiene with the utmost calm.

'Tell me, imposter: who are you?'

'She's dying,' giggled Butler Freddie. 'She's going down...'

The Doctor looked at the body on the bed. He looked at the black, endless Trophy Room with its motionless, illuminated treasures. He looked at Sebastiene, who leaned casually against the dangling screen. And when he had looked everywhere, he knew he had no choice.

'You've won,' he said. 'I'm the Doctor. I'm the real Doctor.'



Sebastiene put his hand over his mouth. He coughed. No, not a cough: a giggle.

The Doctor wasn't in the mood. 'All right,' he muttered. 'Now let Donna go.'

The restrainers held him firm. Up on the screen, in her pretend hotel room, Donna slept. How long, he thought, how long does she have?

Sebastiene composed himself. He took a deep breath and started to speak. However, before any words could emerge, he snorted out a laugh. His gorgeous blue eyes were moist as he erupted into a fit of loud gusty chuckles.

He wept with laughter.

‘Share the joke,’ said the Doctor.

Sebastiene held up a hand, indicating he would reply when he could. The Doctor stared at him, stern and angry.

Finally, Sebastiene managed to control himself. ‘I apologise. It’s just that... that I *get it!* I understand the Doctor Trap! Damned obvious if you’re in the know; impossible if you’re not. Brilliant, Doctor! Oh, what a clever fellow you are.’

The Doctor strained against the metal bonds. ‘Thank you, but Donna... safe... right?’

‘Oh I wouldn’t go as far as to say “safe”,’ said Sebastiene. He looked up at the screen. ‘What use is she now?’

Her chest was rising and falling. But was it slowing?

The Doctor couldn’t be certain. How long would she last without oxygen? How much was she using up?

‘I’m warning you, Sebastiene, all games apart, if you harm her...’

Sebastiene grabbed the Doctor’s face, inspecting it.

‘Quite, quite remarkable. What a clever chap. Fiendishly clever. Devilishly clever, in fact...’

‘Can I kill him now?’ asked a hopeful Butler Freddie.

‘Oh no,’ boomed Sebastiene, raising his arms to the

sky, making his speech to the heavens. ‘We don’t kill our friends. Do we? Eh, Baris?’

It took a moment for the Doctor to take in the words.

He struggled round to look at Sebastiene. ‘Baris?’

The Butler also realised. It visibly sagged, knowing the effort to come. ‘Er, no, my master. This is the Doctor. The real Doctor. He told you.’

The robot shook the Doctor, who took that as a hint.

‘Yes, I told you. I am the Doctor.’

‘Let’s think this through,’ said Sebastiene. ‘Release.’

He clicked his fingers and the metal bonds relaxed and withdrew.

‘Sir,’ stumbled Butler Freddie. ‘You’re wrong.’

Sebastiene gritted his teeth. ‘I run this planet, so do as I say or you can join your scheming little friend the Supervisor on the scrapheap.’

The Doctor rubbed his wrists. He had to get Donna out of that room.

Sebastiene’s face was without expression. ‘I really don’t see any need for Donna any more. Not when I have you. Don’t you understand, Baris? The Doctor has hypnotised you into thinking you’re him. He must have wrestled the hypno-device from you and reversed its effect. He sent you here to help him get through the

hunting zones. The fifth column; the fly in the ointment.

The Doctor Trap, brilliant!’

The Doctor sighed. ‘No, it’s the other way round, don’t you see? I am the real Doctor. I am. Look, I’ve got the two hearts, the Time Lord DNA.’

Sebastiene nodded indulgently. ‘As does Baris. There is no physical way to tell you apart.’

‘Sebastiene. Come on. You know I’m telling the truth. I know things only the real Doctor would know.’

Sebastiene thought this statement through. ‘If the Doctor has made you believe you’re the Doctor, then your understanding of being the Doctor is based on your own knowledge of the Doctor’s history. As none of us know as much about the Doctor’s history as you do, how are we to know whether what you know is what the Doctor really knows or just what you know about the Doctor?’

He smiled. ‘You see?’

Butler Freddie scratched his head. ‘My master. Can you say that again?’

‘No.’

The Doctor tried another tack. ‘Look, remember what you said the other day. You can kill me and I’ll regenerate. Well, if it saves Donna’s life.’ He closed his eyes nobly and stood to attention. ‘I’ll even let the Butler do it.’

‘Oh, yes please,’ said Butler Freddie, licking his lips.

‘You’ve perked up,’ the Doctor opened one eye and glared.

The Trophy Room was quiet. The Doctor felt the cold eyes of the lifeless exhibits boring into him. How soon before he joined them?

‘No,’ said Sebastiene.

‘You know it’s the only way to be sure!’ the Doctor yelled. ‘Do it, Sebastiene!’

Sebastiene giggled. He was enjoying the intrigue; the game.

‘Here’s why not. You might believe you’ll regenerate but you won’t. What killing you will do is lose me a chance of catching the real thing.’

‘I am the Doctor!’ shouted the Doctor. ‘I swear on my...’

‘Now I’m interested. What will you swear on?’

‘I swear on my lives, as the last Time Lord. Terminate my life. Regenerate me. Just save Donna.’

He looked up at the big screen again and could see that Donna’s breathing was... well, it was gone. She was suffocating.

‘You really would do that?’ Sebastiene finally started to look convinced. He stared at the Doctor.

‘This is my problem,’ he said at last. ‘If you are the real Doctor, then I don’t need Donna Noble any more. If you’re Baris, I still need her, and for that reason I’ll save her life. Which is it?’

The Doctor was stuck. Completely stuck.

‘Well?’ asked Sebastiene.

‘I must be Baris,’ said the Doctor.

Sebastiene shouted, ‘Oxygenate Exclusion Zone 15.

There. Wasn’t so hard, was it?’

The Doctor sagged. ‘Thank you, Sebastiene.’

Sebastiene nodded, his charm and good humour back on show. ‘A fine night’s work,’ he said. ‘Shall we take tea? We can talk about what I want you to do next.’

The train seemed to know where it was going. Whatever the destination, they were travelling there in a real hurry. Someone had a plan.

Which was lucky because Baris was busy. The train compartment was well furnished and luckily there was a really nice comfy bed for him to fall onto. Now he couldn’t get up again.

The false memory implant was growing stronger. This character, this other person, was rattling around inside his head. Whoever he was, he was responsible for a dull banging in his mind that wouldn’t let up. Literally a pain

in the neck.

As the Doctor, Baris knew he was strong enough to resist any attempt to overwhelm him, but by heaven it was hard work. The other personality was so real; so detailed. 'I am the Doctor,' Baris shouted, although he couldn't remember that at all.

Instead, he kept thinking about a large country house... no, not a house, a palace. Overdone like a giant wedding cake. And there was a man there too – a really attractive man, the kind of man you would lay down your life for. The man was smiling at him, and Baris remembered words. These words were joyous words, for the beautiful man was offering him everything he ever wanted. If only he could remember what he wanted. What did the Doctor want? Apart from to find Donna, of course.

He remembered a bright white medical room.

Incredible machinery; almost alive in its sumptuous complexity. Subatomic body scans, liquid diagnosis baths, infinitely tiny nano-scalpels. Him, cocooned in a bath of thick multicoloured sludge, swirling lights, the scalpels tickling his insides.

What did it mean? Why would this memory be important? There had to be a reason for the level of detail. The other character was much stronger now; the sad

one who lay in his room and electronically scanned the galaxy day after day after same old day. Baris knew this character's habits, the rituals he went through before inserting the i-Dock. He knew the names of this character's colleagues: Mou Loobom from Jupiter colony, obsessed with 'sorting' the Time Lord's timeline, upset when it just refused to make sense. Princess Po – clone monarchist of Derridan, who had turned her entire town into a replica TARDIS. The smug Hamble Consort with his insane theory that the Doctor was an anti-capitalist white magician.

Acolytes, the same as him. No, not the same: rivals, envious of him. Because he knew more, was the best. Sitting on this train hour after hour, Baris came to realise the pain had reversed. Now the headaches were coming when he forced himself to remember he was the Doctor. This other personality was a relaxing place to be, an easy place. The Doctor sparked painful lights in his mind. Much easier to go with the flow, let the train take the strain; let in those memories of life in the Proximan Housing Unit...

No!

Baris sat up and a bolt of pain travelled from his brain through his hearts and down his spine. He punched

himself in the forehead. 'You are the Doctor!' He willed

this to be true. 'You. Are. The. Doctor.'

He had to stay awake and sane, no matter how painful.

If he gave in, the Doctor would be lost for ever.

'She's never going to believe me.'

'She had better, Baris, or she dies.'

'This doesn't make any sense. What if I am the real

Doctor?'

'You're not.'

'I don't get how you can be so sure?'

'You're not the Doctor. You're Baris, and the real

Doctor has hypnotised you into believing you're the

Doctor.'

'Why?'

'To help him survive the hunters.'

'I've got the Doctor's memories!'

'He implanted them.'

'What? In five minutes in a corridor in a base under

siege? I'm good but I'm not God.'

'He could have taken you to his TARDIS. Time has no

meaning there.'

'I have no memory of being Baris.'

'He's wiped them.'

'Even if I'm not the Doctor, the fact that I'm helping

him is going to be dangerous to you. And how about this:

if you put me in that Trophy Room and pretend, who's going to know? No one goes in there anyway.'

'I want the real thing.'

'Sending me there doesn't make any sense. Why?'

'The Doctor Trap.'

'There is no Doctor Trap.'

'The Doctor Trap. Saying there isn't one is proof there is. That's why you're going.'

'You're crazy.'

'Yes. But you're still going.'

What the robots could never get, what they could never understand, was that he enjoyed taking risks. His Butler moped around the control room. Why did the robot have to be so negative? All it did was drag everyone down.

'Bored!' Sebastiene announced. The servants looked up. 'As soon as the Doctor is stuffed and mounted,' he said, 'I'm going to change everything. The Chateau, the way I run things and you lot. I'm going to get you to throw yourselves in the furnaces.' The thought made him laugh. He gestured the robots to join in and they did.

'Oh, shut up. You're getting on my nerves.'

The laughter stopped and the control room fell silent.

'My master, hasn't the time come to restore the IMT?'

asked the Butler.

Sebastiene sighed. He clicked his fingers and his giant throne rose through the marble flooring. Its components shifted and clicked as it assembled itself. Sebastiene fell back on his pillows. Negative, he thought. Robots.

‘Look,’ he explained, ‘if Baris thinks he’s the Doctor, that makes him the perfect undercover man. He’s the one person Donna Noble trusts. Eventually, she’ll let out what she knows about the Doctor Trap.’

‘But putting them together like that?’ asked the Butler.

‘Heaven knows what they’ll get up to. And what about the real Doctor? He’s still loose in the monorail network.’

‘Don’t be such a baby. I will explain this once, just to avoid any more impertinent questions. If I were the Doctor, I would have implanted instructions that if Baris located the girl, he was to drop everything and use all available means to contact him. The Doctor did after all come to Planet 1 to find her.’

The Butler thought it through. ‘Soo... by doing exactly what the Doctor wants, you’re wrecking his plan?’

‘Exactly. We don’t need to scour the planetary monorail network. He’ll come to us. Or rather, Baris.’

‘I can see that, my master. But won’t they just escape?’

Without IMT, we can’t keep track of them.’

Sebastiene pointed to the screen. 'Look. Use those big eyes of yours. What's that?'

The Butler looked harder. He squinted. 'Um.'

'It's a prison zone, numpty!' Sebastiene hurled a cushion at the gargantuan robot. 'Once in, no one gets out.'

The Butler stepped back. He looked to the screen, then back to Sebastiene. Then to the screen and back to his beloved master. 'That's... that's brilliant, master.'

'Of course.'

'And even if that is the real Doctor...' it continued.

'Which it isn't...'

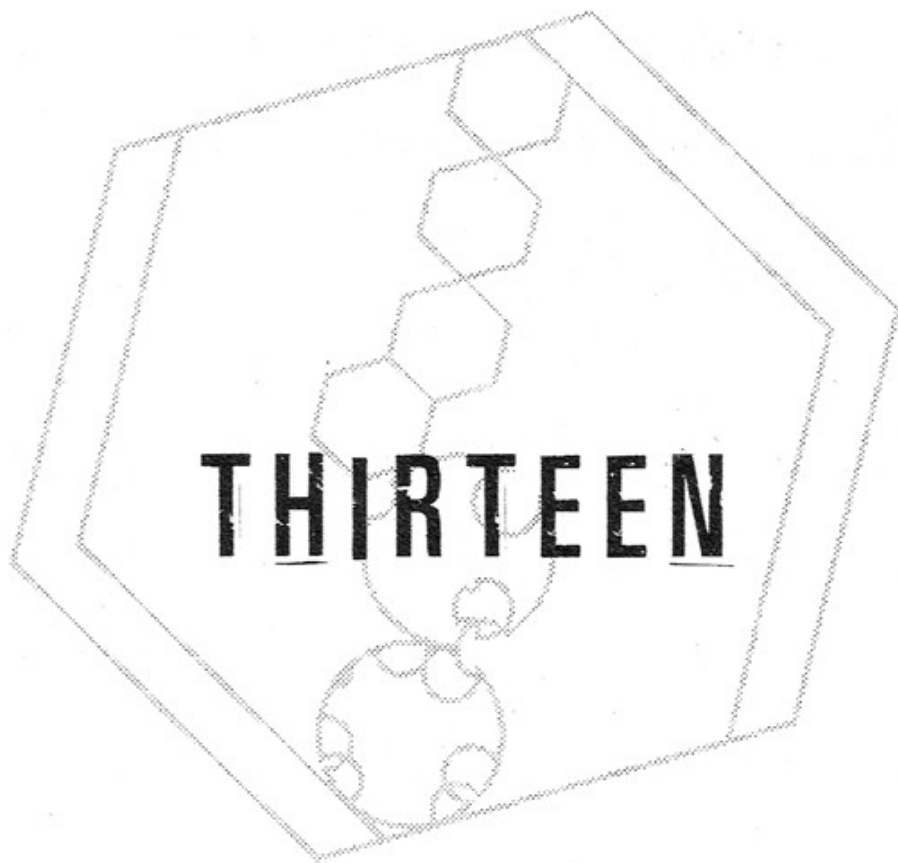
'He's trapped there anyway.'

Sebastiene leaned back into his remaining cushions. 'I wish you lot would have a bit more faith sometimes.

Honestly, I'm surrounded by dullards. At least Baris and Ms Noble were interesting. When they're dead, I'll have to build some just like them.'

He sat up. 'Now listen carefully. I want you to contact the rest of the hunters. I'm changing the game. Get them to the prison zone. They can fight it out between themselves. You never know; maybe one of them will even manage to get the Doctor. And charge up my trusty atmosphere craft. The green one. We're going on the

attack!’



Either Sebastiene was very smart, or he really was that stupid. For the lives of him, the Doctor couldn't work out which.

Somehow, unbelievably, the last-gasp plan had worked. By claiming to be the Doctor, Sebastiene had instinctively not believed him. The more the Doctor insisted, the less he was believed. There was even a bonus: he had been sent to contact Donna.

When he was caught by the Butler, the Doctor had forced himself to stay calm and think his way through

Sebastiene's thought processes. He needed to find a weakness, a key. That or he and Donna were dead. Sebastiene was a schemer; he was a planner, a second guesser. And, sometimes, he would over-guess and see complications where there weren't any. The Doctor had gambled on that flaw in Sebastiene's character and it appeared to have paid off. Not without some damage to the Doctor's nerves, however, which were well and truly shredded. More than once, he had been sure he was doomed. The stress had been monumental.

'Forget it,' he said to himself. 'There's work to do.'

So forget it the Doctor did.

The sliding doors swished open, and he stepped into the lobby of the Bracknell Exquisite Traveller Hotel. Just behind a set of closed double doors, he heard a large group of diners eating.

'Aural triggers? Bit sad, Sebastiene. Don't you have any friends you could use to make the place sound full?'

He thought about that. 'Actually, you don't, do you...' The Doctor brushed off the sprinkles of rain that had blotted his suit.

How on earth had he ended up here? Not only that: what had possessed Sebastiene to send him? There must be a plan. He had to be bait in some extravagantly

prepared trap.

The Doctor stopped himself. He was using the same flawed thinking that had snared Sebastiene. At some point, you had to stop seeing plans behind plans. Sometimes, you just had to take what was in front of you at face value. So, excuse the pun, let's *face* it, Sebastiene could just be that stupid.

Where to find Donna?

The lobby was bland; entirely without character. After the excesses of the Chateau, the Doctor found the novelty pleasing on the eye. Although there was no one about, he had the strangest impression that a lot of people were just about to walk in; that they were just out of sight, watching.

The Doctor sniffed the air, then licked and held up a finger. 'Pheromone Conditioning Unit.'

He decided to address the unseen, imaginary audience.

'Smell molecules swished through the air to give the impression that living people are around. PCU's do lots of fun things. Sneak one into a séance, or a supposedly haunted house, engineer religious epiphanies, fool well-meaning parapsychologists... fun stuff. No party should be without one.'

'Welcome to the Exquisite Traveller,' said a bright

voice from reception. ‘My name is Sadie. How can I make your day better?’

‘And pass robots off as human beings,’ the Doctor summed up. He swung round to face Sadie the smiling receptionist.

‘Ah,’ he said, rushing up to her. ‘Most twenty-first-century Earth hotel receptionists only resemble emotionless artificial constructs. You’re the real thing.’

‘How lovely,’ said Sadie then repeated: ‘How can I make your day better?’

‘Just this,’ said the Doctor as he leaned over the reception desk and pressed the back of her neck. Sadie stood stock still, grin fixed to her face. The Doctor nodded. ‘That’s just in case you start sprouting weapons from unexpected places. I know what you robots are like – one minute it’s all “humour, an interesting concept”, and the next your hands drop off to reveal deadly whirly blades.’

He heard a thump from the floor above. Somebody hitting something hard with some sort of object. The Doctor heard a woman laugh.

‘Now, you can’t fake her,’ said the Doctor and dashed to the stairs.

Donna was using an umbrella to knock holes in doors.

Every time she smashed one open, she put her face to the gap and shouted: 'Here's Donna!'

OK, an Exquisite Traveller Courtesy Umbrella wasn't exactly Jack Nicholson with an axe, but she was having the best fun she had had in ages. Actually: the first fun. She reached Room 212. Inside, a man and a woman appeared to be discussing something urgent. Donna couldn't make out what they were saying but it definitely sounded urgent.

'Go on! Have a good old natter!' She swung the brolly. The plastic handle cracked into the wood, causing more damage to the weapon than the target. Hitting the door stopped the voices within.

'What's the matter?' Donna shouted. 'Cat got your tongue?'

Angered beyond endurance, she hammered away. When the umbrella splintered into fragments, she hurled it aside and kicked until she broke the lock. Like all the others, Room 212 was empty. There was the same well-made bed, the same little TV, the kettle on the shelf and the same bowl containing the same sachets of tea, coffee and sugar.

Donna marched inside, triumphant. 'Yeah,' she said.

'Now you shut up.' She was aware of the tremor in her

voice. She was close to cracking up. Another door, she thought, just keeping breaking the doors.

She marched out to see the Doctor in the corridor. He was just standing on that horrible carpet waiting for her. 'Hello, Donna,' he said and smiled that smile that made everything better.

He was the Doctor and he was here. No mistaking that tatty suit and trainers, his elfin face, those sharp eyes that didn't miss a thing.

Her first instinct was to burst into tears. Everything was going to be all right again.

He held out his arms for a hug. However, Donna had learned not to trust first instincts. Not here in this prison where nothing was what it seemed.

'Prove you're you,' She took a pace back. Her eyes were filling with water. 'Prove you're my Doctor. I don't get fooled again.'

'The Who?' he said.

'Shut up. Prove you're the Doctor.'

'How?' He looked shifty, as if someone was watching.

'You already know. The Doctor would know.'

'Donna, what's happened?'

Donna pointed at him, choking the sobs back down her throat. 'He said he would send someone for me. I never

thought it would be you. So maybe you're someone who looks like you.'

'Who said? Sebastiene?'

'Prove you're you.'

'Donna, I... look, it's difficult.'

'Prove it!' She held up the broken handle. 'Or I'll whack you.'

She expected a wisecrack or a quip and was confused when all she saw in his eyes was sorrow. 'I... I'm not going to be able to do that,' he said.

She raised the broom higher.

'How about a truce?' he suggested. 'You don't have to believe I'm me, but we can still share information, right?'

'Share information... so that's what it's about.'

'Eh?'

'You want me to tell you about the Doctor Trap.'

The Doctor looked surprised. 'How do you know about the Doctor Trap?'

'You told me, remember?'

'No.'

They stood and looked at each other. She wanted to believe him, she really did. But how could she trust anybody here?

'I've got an idea,' she said.

‘Oh good.’ He looked genuinely relieved.

‘You tell me how to get out of here and I’ll tell you...

I’ll tell you what I know about the Doctor Trap.’

For a second, she saw him smile. An old smile that appeared on his mouth only on the rare occasions she managed to get something right. A warm (and although she would never tell him) human smile.

She nearly gave in and believed him there and then, but just as quickly the smile was gone and he was... well, whoever he was again.

‘You get me?’ she asked.

‘I get you.’

‘Deal? Or... um... no deal?’

‘Deal. Let’s get downstairs.’

Donna watched him as he walked into the reception.

There was something missing from this Doctor, despite that tricky smile. He lacked his usual zip, his usual enthusiasm. That could never be duplicated. The real thing had twice the standard energy.

Yeah, this one was a fake all right. But maybe if she just went along with the game, went along with him, he would actually get her out.

Why not? She could happily tell this fake Doctor what she knew about the Doctor Trap because she didn’t know

anything about the Doctor Trap.

‘I’ve tried the road,’ she told the Doctor. ‘Don’t think you can get me to fall for that one.’

‘Wouldn’t dream of it,’ he replied. ‘Say goodbye to Sadie on the way out.’

He had done something to the receptionist. She was frozen like a shop-window dummy. Just standing there with that big stupid grin on her face. Her jewelled hand was raised in frozen greeting.

‘I knew she wasn’t human,’ she said. ‘Can I knock her head off?’

‘Well, I won’t stop you.’

Donna looked at the stopped robot. She had had enough of breaking inanimate objects. ‘She ain’t worth it. Not her fault, is it? Just get me out of here.’

The Doctor stopped, right at the exit. ‘I’ve thought of something.’

‘Here we go...’

‘When do you tell me about the Doctor Trap? Before or after we’re out?’

‘Are you taking the mick?’

‘No, no. We both know Sebastiene wants the secret of the Doctor Trap...’

‘Well, I didn’t until you just said... but I had guessed.’

‘I presume he’s listening or watching all the time. So if you were to tell me now he doesn’t have much reason to let either of us go, does he?’

Donna pushed him to the doors. ‘Only if you’re the real Doctor.’

‘I’m just wondering how this is going to play out.

Sebastiene’s not particularly stable, you know.’

Donna kept pushing him. Through the doors and out into the rain. ‘To be honest,’ she said. ‘I don’t care. I don’t have a clue why I’m here or what’s going on.’

The Doctor turned; he stumbled on the wet gravel. ‘Ah, now I can help you there. You see, Sebastiene is this despotic but rather lonely ruler of a planet where through robotic technology he has the power of a god. Because he’s really, really bored of being all-powerful on a planet where there’s no one to boss around, he organised this little safari with me as the target. It’s wet.’

‘You’ll get used to the rain. And by the way,’ she put on a sweet voice. ‘You’re not convincing me.’

‘Only he made a mistake with the lure...’

Donna screwed up a face. ‘The Lurgh? What’s that? An alien?’

‘The bait,’ said the Doctor patiently. ‘To get me to his planet. He found this bloke who knew lots and lots about

me and did him up to make him look like me. Operated on him big time. Really went to town on the whole making him look like me business. DNA, two hearts, the lot.'

'Why would he want to do that? Frame you for a crime you didn't commit and have you arrested?'

The Doctor laughed. 'You watch too many movies. No, he did it to convince you to come with him to Planet 1.'

Donna winced. She remembered, Snowcap Base and the creature. The doubts in her mind she hadn't paid attention to. 'That seems like a million years ago.'

'Sebastiene knew I would follow, especially as he had my TARDIS. My double had my DNA and a key from somewhere, which meant he could operate the TARDIS.'

The Doctor paused. 'You see, that annoys me. That really gets my goat that does.'

'So you say. Or you've been told to say.' Donna pushed him on.

'Why would I make that up?'

'To gain my sympathy.'

The Doctor shook his head. 'So much cynicism in one so young.'

'It passes the time. Where are we going by the way?'

Donna said this as the Doctor seemed to be leading her exactly the same route she tried when she attempted her

first escape. 'I told you, that road doesn't go anywhere.'

The Doctor kept moving. 'Yeah it does.'

'No it doesn't.'

'It does.'

'I'm telling you, no...'

He stopped and Donna cannoned into his back. The non-existent traffic droned over the hill. Putting his hands on his hips, he turned to her. 'Look, do you trust me or not?'

'No.'

'Good, then just do as I... what do you mean, no?'

Donna put her face to his. 'That road does not go anywhere. It's a big circle.'

He nodded. 'That's because it's not a road.'

'What is it then?'

'A train station.'

Donna looked at her feet, then up at him. 'You are kidding me,' she said.

The Doctor was also looking at the ground. 'Should be here somewhere... ah!'

Kneeling, he gave her a wicked look. He pressed a patch of ground and the grass slid aside. Underneath was a big red button. The Doctor thumped the button.

Donna stood back in disbelief as concealed hydraulics

began to whine and a whole section of road slid apart to reveal a set of gleaming silver steps. ‘You are kidding...’ she managed.

‘The great thing about Planet 1,’ he said, ‘is that once you’re in the know, you understand you’re never more than a kilometre away from a robot workshop, or a train station.’

Donna jumped and clapped her hands. ‘You beauty!’

The Doctor winked. ‘All aboard.’

As the IMT was disconnected, Sebastiene was forced to rely on microphones and cameras. To be fair to Planet 1, these cameras and microphones were totally undetectable – hidden as they were in insects or seeds or blades of grass – but it was annoying to have to keep switching angles. Still, these things were sent to try him.

He watched Baris and Donna descend the steps to the monorail platform. The robots watched with him, including the Butler who wanted to complain about something but didn’t dare.

‘He really believes he’s the Doctor,’ Sebastiene remarked, fascinated. ‘I wonder what he’ll do next. Is there a monorail on the way?’

An operator robot read the screen. ‘Yes, master.

Scheduled maintenance components carriage M-Z44i3.

Dropping off spare parts for the prison zone.’

Sebastiene looked at the screen. In the zone the rain still fell, the trees rustled in the artificial wind. The hole in the ground dripped.

‘Switch to station cameras. I can’t wait to see what happens next.’

The Carpalian Witch was in that strange state of waking sleep. She was both at once, an ability unique to her species. Wrapped in her web on the first floor ceiling of an old abandoned house, the Witch could spend weeks in this condition.

Part of her brain was aware of every creak and scrape within a two-mile radius. At the same time she was dreaming, conserving her strength, wrapped tightly against the damp and woodworm.

The Carpalian Witch was waiting for the Doctor. When he arrived, her telepathy would detect him and she would emit suitable scents that would entice him into her room. Once inside, she would unfurl her hidden legs and drop down. Game over.

With the dream side of her brain, the Carpalian Witch relived her previous biggest catch. The Sontaran. A clone species with no imagination was a tough call. She got him in the end, of course. She hid inside his bubble spaceship

for six weeks and slipped a finger into his probic vent when he recharged. A doughy, flavourless quality had the Sontarans. Not worth bothering with twice.

Not like the Doctor. The Doctor was class.

To be honest, the Carpalian Witch wasn't expecting the Time Lord to show. The odds were against it. She knew her fellow hunters by reputation and it was a fair bet one of them would get him. Still, if there was one thing she was good at, it was waiting.

Her telepathy tickled. Something had entered her hunting range. She phased into full wakefulness. She flexed her fingers.

Someone was kicking up dust outside. They weren't trying to hide their footsteps.

The Carpalian Witch readied herself. The prey opened the door. The Witch made herself as still as concrete.

The figure walked in. Silent as death itself, the Carpalian Witch dropped.

She had extended her furry legs round its side and was busy biting its plastic neck before she realised this was a servitor android; one of Sebastiene's confectionary-coloured servants.

The android stood still as the Carpalian Witch disengaged and retracted her fingernails. She dusted off

the remains of her web and put her hood back over her dark, glittering eyes. She stood in the room and resembled a human again.

‘A change in the rules,’ said the robot. ‘Read this.’ It handed her a palm-sized digital screen. ‘You leave at once.’

In Hunting Zone 9, Zzorg Zero was surprised to receive a visit from Sebastiene’s servant. Not that Zzorg Zero did not understand that the whole tribe around him were robots too. He was well aware of that fact. He was surprised that this one completely broke the illusion by wearing the uniform of the Chateau. He was also surprised that it walked out of a sudden hole in the methane swamp not twenty metres away.

He was even more surprised to receive orders telling him to get on a train that was waiting for him in a hidden monorail system beneath the same methane swamp. Zzorg Zero was surprised but he wasn’t thrown. Unfurling his gossamer wings, he buzzed down to the waiting train. Colonel Sty of the Bolken Context read his orders, fixed his watch to Stable Time, loaded his considerable array of weapons and marched into his train. As the station doors closed above his head, his squad of native hunters disconnected and dropped, ready for collection and

recycling. The Bolken Zone went dark.

All across Planet 1, the members of the Society for Endangered Dangerous Species were requested to move zones. They weren't surprised. No one had expected the Doctor to be an easy catch, and none of them trusted Sebastiene.

All relished the challenge. Eight trains containing eight hunters converged on one zone. They travelled along Planet 1's frictionless tunnels with a speed beyond most of the passengers' imaginations. Still, they were pleased by the pace.

They all wanted the Doctor.

There came a whistling from the tunnel. Donna felt no wind pushing against her like she would have on the London Underground, but she understood that something was approaching at an incredible speed.

'Just in time,' said the Doctor. 'We should get out of here, fast. I don't know what Sebastiene's up to, but I'm sure it didn't involve me knowing about this train station.'

'More of a platform really though isn't it?' said Donna.

'Station is a bit of a big word for what we have here.'

'I've missed you, Donna.'

'Sarky...'

The whistling increased in volume, then stopped. The

Doctor looked impressed. ‘Hmm. Audio Vacuum Filters to dissipate the ultra-frequency sound. Good thing too, or the train’s arrival would have burst your eardrums.’ He seemed incredibly pleased by that notion.

Silent, the train slid into the platform, at which point it stopped dead. Donna found the sensation alarming. ‘How many laws of physics just got broken there?’

‘Lots,’ came the Doctor’s reply.

The train hummed with power. Two solid double doors stood in front of them.

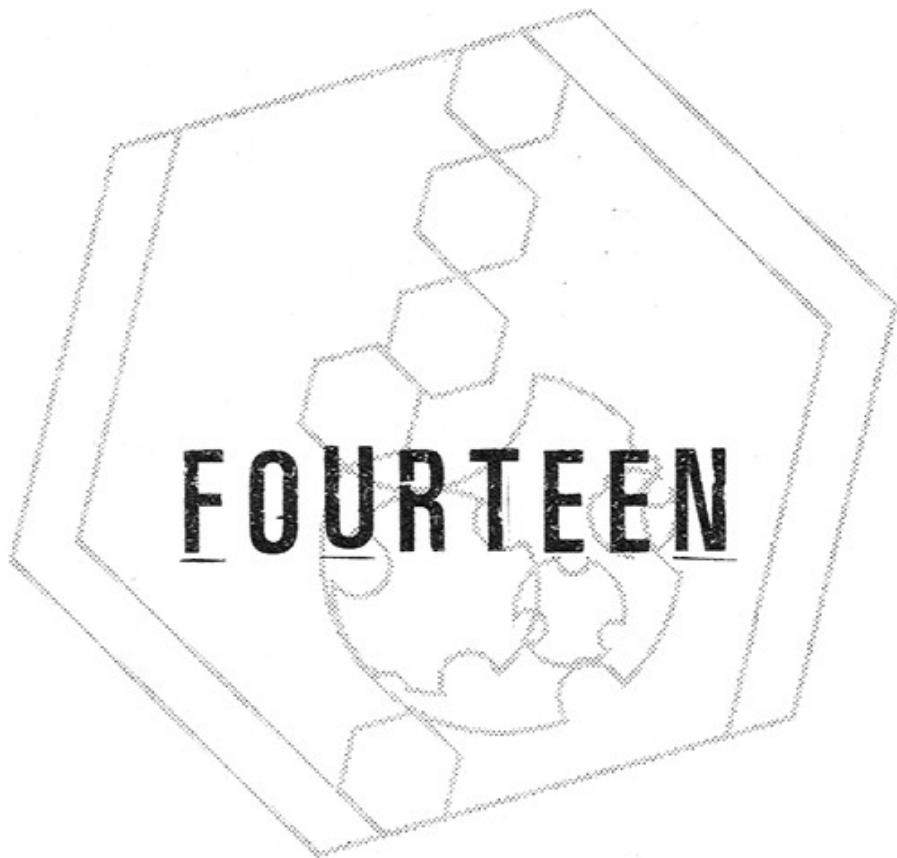
‘You know,’ Donna said, feeling tender, ‘I’m beginning to believe you.’

The train doors opened. ‘I’m going to say it again,’ said the Doctor with a big smile. ‘Cos I like saying it.’ He cleared his throat. ‘All aboard!’

Donna wasn’t laughing. She wasn’t saying anything. She was just looking. At the Doctor who stood on the train.

‘Donna!’ said the new Doctor. ‘I’ve come to rescue you.’

By her side, the real Doctor just moaned, ‘Oh no.’



‘Shut down! Lock it down!’ Sebastiene yelled at the operator.

Not fazed by the outburst, the robot obeyed, punching in a code. A satisfying electronic alarm blared out. ‘Prison zone secured, my master.’

Sebastiene didn’t move. His face remained completely still. He stared at the screen; at the two Doctors looking at each other.

Sebastiene’s left cheek twitched. His upper lip quivered. His eyes closed. ‘I was right,’ he whispered. He opened his eyes again and turned to the cowering

Butler. 'I've done it.' He grabbed the Butler by the shoulders. 'I was right. I was right! I've sprung the Doctor Trap!' He kissed the Butler and threw him off.

Sebastiene punched the air, ran, then fell to his knees and slid along the floor. 'Result!'

The Butler smiled, slowly understanding. 'He got him. My master got the Doctor!' Out of nowhere, a stadium full of cheering and applause rang round the control room. The operator robots joined in. They clapped Sebastiene. Except one. He was the robot monitoring the monorail network.

'Err, my master?' The robot looked pained as it coughed to get Sebastiene's attention.

Sebastiene was busy on his knees, taking in the applause. He wiped the tears off his face. 'What is it?'

The operator robot winced. 'There's... there's another train heading towards the prison zone.'

Suddenly, the lights in the control room turned red. The cheering and clapping was replaced by a cool, emotionless female voice droning: 'Emergency! Collision imminent. Emergency! Collision imminent...'

'Eh?' said Sebastiene.

The Doctors' eyes were bulging so hard they threatened to pop from their sockets. All four of them.

Donna was looking from one to the other. ‘Oh my

God,’ she kept saying. ‘Oh my God.’

They were exactly alike. They were both the Doctor.

Not look-a-likes, not impersonators, not stand-ins. They were both the real thing. Except of course, one of them couldn’t be.

‘Donna,’ they both said at once.

The Doctor from the train said, ‘That man is an impostor. He’s been surgically altered to look like me to lure you to Planet 1 and hunt me down.’

The Doctor she had been with, the one she had found outside the hotel room, was deep in thought.

‘Well?’ she couldn’t help but ask him. ‘We need to sort this. What have you got to say for yourself?’

The hotel Doctor seemed to be in physical pain. ‘All right,’ he said. He glared down the platform. ‘No choice. I hope you’re paying attention, Sebastiene.’

‘I’m the Doctor,’ said Baris, butting in.

‘And I’m Baris,’ said the Doctor.

They looked at each other.

Donna looked at them. ‘That feels right,’ she said.

‘There’s an emotional subconscious bond thing I have with the real Doctor. Call it woman’s instinct, call it whatever. And I never trusted you,’ she pointed to the real

Doctor. 'You were always too good to be true.'

She pointed at Baris. 'I feel a connection with you. It just feels right.' She eyeballed the real Doctor. 'Got that? Fake?'

He sighed. 'Yes, Donna, I got that.'

Donna clapped her hands. 'Then let's get the hell out of here.'

The ground began to shake.

'What's going on?' Sebastiene stared at a red pixelated dot racing through the computer-modelled tunnel. 'This can't be...

'Terminate that train!' yelled the Butler, taking over as Sebastiene dithered.

'I can't,' replied the operator robot as it frantically flexed its hands.

Sebastiene grabbed the skull-docked robot's hand and snatched at the floating icons.

No change. The red pill-shaped light representing the train was moving quickly along a black line representing the tunnel. Sebastiene looked up, stunned.

'Even the Doctor couldn't... not from there... what have I missed? What have I missed?'

He looked around the room for clues. The Butler shrugged.

‘Someone in the Chateau? Still. Surely not...’

For the first time since the Butler’s activation, it saw that Sebastiene looked frightened. The robot’s programming refused to comprehend the emotion.

‘My master?’ it said, a chill in its own voice. ‘What’s wrong? Do you need tea?’

Sebastiene started to bite his nails. ‘I should have known about that train. I rule here. I should have known!’ He thumped the operator robot.

The Butler thought. ‘Perhaps the Doctor pre-arranged the train to go rogue before you sent him to the girl.’

‘Impossible. No one could have that amount of foresight. And it wasn’t the Doctor I sent there, it was Baris. How come the computer didn’t pick up the train jumping the tracks? Why didn’t we have alarms?’

‘The train went offline from the network forty-six hours ago,’ said the operator robot. It opened a large-scale virtual chart of the monorail system. ‘At the Beriagrad Zone.’

‘That’s the other side of the planet. How could it go all that way and not be picked up?’

‘I cannot explain.’ The operator robot’s voice was a monotone. Its plastic face had no emotion.

Sebastiene looked round. Suddenly, the control room

seemed a large, cold and unfriendly place. Too many shadows; too many robots. He bit his lip. 'Find out,' he barked at the Butler. 'And get my transport. I want to be airborne in ten minutes.'

'Impact in ten seconds,' said another robot.

'Move the first train, the Doctor's train. Get it out of there.'

The operator robot looked up. 'I cannot, my master.

You have ordered that zone to be locked down.'

This time Sebastiene did not just look frightened. His face was utterly pale, his voice a whisper. 'Who's doing this?'

The Doctor knelt and felt the platform floor. The vibration made his arm shake. There was a familiar shrieking noise in the tunnel. The train on the rail was not apparently going anywhere. He looked up.

'I'm sorry to break up your cuddles, chaps, but I think we're in for quite a sizeable train crash any second now.'

Donna released the man she mistakenly presumed was her companion. She looked at him for guidance.

'Don't worry, Donna,' Baris said. 'I'll get us out of here. The stairs!' He pointed and pushed her towards the exit. He turned, gave a melodramatic look to the tunnel as if to emphasise its peril; then sprinted away.

‘Oh great,’ said the real Doctor and followed. Surely he didn’t go in for those kind of theatricals? Mind, he upped his pace as the whistle of the approaching train grew louder. And he looked back.

The noise penetrated even above ground. The bland trees were shaking rain from their branches and leaves. Donna and Baris ran across the mud towards the hotel.

‘We’ll be safe in there!’ shouted Baris. ‘That building thing!’

‘The hotel? Are you sure?’ Donna yelled. ‘What if it collapses?’

She heard a shout from behind. The other Doctor.

‘Don’t go in the hotel!’ he was yelling. ‘Just get on the ground!’ As if to set an example, that Doctor dived onto the mud and covered his ears.

‘Into the building,’ insisted Baris, although he did not actually sound that sure of himself.

The grass in front of them rippled like a gigantic worm was burrowing underground. Suddenly, the fake cars in the fake car park jumped and their windows shattered. A dozen blaring alarms added to the noise. The hotel itself lurched and a huge crack spread like forked lightning up from its base. An entire side of hotel room windows fell out.

By now, the ground wasn't rippling; it was churning.

'Donna!' came a hoarse, tiny voice in the distance.

'Just... duck!'

She didn't know why she obeyed; she just did. She pounced on Baris and dumped him into the mud. Its sticky damp shoved itself into her face and eyes and up her nose, just as the ground burst open and they were both lifted on a raft of turf and shoved a couple of metres backwards.

The noise of the underground explosion was indescribable.

She hit the ground, or whatever the hard horizontal thing was, and the air was shunted out of her body.

Because the noise had deafened her, she had a pleasant few timeless moments of nothingness. That was good; that was soothing. But all too soon the whistling in her ears and the mud in her eyes brought Donna back to horrible reality.

Something was wrong. The ground appeared to be on top of her. She had been buried. She punched an arm up through the soil and felt cold rain on her fist. Not allowing herself to scream and the mud to sink in, she wriggled and wriggled until she got enough purchase to push her other arm out. She then spent ten panicked seconds tearing that mud away. At last, she levered her head up and felt the

wind on her face. Spitting the gritty mud out, she wiped her eyes clear.

The hotel had been destroyed. Apparently, a silver vacuum cleaner had come out of the ground and eaten it. No, not a vacuum cleaner. A hissing, steaming metal tube train with a flattened front end. The machine lay broken-backed on top of a pyramid of cheap Bracknell breeze blocks.

Donna knelt for a while; then managed to stand. She was caked in filth. The whistling in her ears died down to be replaced by the crackling of flames from a fire somewhere under all that brickwork. The monorail was crushed, wrinkled with dents and full of holes like its hull had been attacked by a giant tin-opener.

The train had punched right through the lobby of the Exquisite Traveller. Her old wing had been turned inside out. The wing next to it still stood, but it was going to need one hell of a paint job if it was going to attract any more exquisite travellers. The walls were scarred and burned black, and all the glass in the windows was broken.

Donna staggered to the ruined entrance. Cars had been scattered like toys, overturned, torn and crushed.

She spotted clues as to what once had stood here: half a

sofa, a little potted tree, a battered sign with the words THE ANCHOR SUITE in scuffed gold letters; all sticking out of mounds of bricks like grave stones. And a hand. A woman's hand, gold rings decorating the middle and fourth fingers.

'Sadie,' Donna breathed.

The hand moved. The fingers flexed.

Donna scrabbled over the concrete ruins. There must be half a ton of hotel on top of the robot. She didn't understand why on earth she would want to help such a vile creature that wasn't even alive, but she just couldn't stand the idea of anything suffering, even Sadie.

She knelt down and pulled the trembling hand out of the rubble. She had expected a pull but there was none. Instead, she fell back, holding the hand at its severed wrist. As she rolled down the bricks, the hand crawled up Donna's arm.

Donna screamed and tore it off. She hurled the hand away. It flopped into the mud, then turned round as if trying to locate her again. The fingers scrabbled in the mud. White fluid dribbled from plastic circuits in the wrist.

'That is disgusting,' Donna said and found herself laughing. She put her own hand to her mouth to stop the

noise. She didn't want that thing finding her again. Not here on her own.

Except of course, she wasn't on her own. She had forgotten him.

'Doctor,' she whispered.

She turned back to the mound of mud that had buried her in the field. The same rain was still falling. She realised that if these fields were real, they should have been as flooded as paddy fields.

A pair of plimsolls was sticking up in the air. Donna hoped that this time a body would be attached to them.

She ran to the plimsolls and tore at the mud. How long did it take to suffocate a man, even a man with two hearts?

How long had he been under there?

At last, she scooped away the soil that was covering his face. The Doctor was pale but breathing. His eyes were firmly closed. 'Wake up!' she yelled.

The eyes opened.

Someone tapped her on the shoulder. Donna shrieked and rolled over. It was the hand, it had to be.

'We need to think seriously about vacating the premises,' said the other Doctor. 'In an orderly fashion would be best, but a madcap dash would do.'

Donna couldn't help it; she smiled. 'And which one are

you?’

‘The real one,’ he replied.

‘You would say that, though.’

‘I would. Sorry. Know that doesn’t help.’

There was an explosion inside the train; a sharp crack.

The Doctor looked round. ‘I think that train was sent here to stop us leaving.’

‘How do you know?’

‘Because it’s probably Commissar Weimark’s train, and it disappeared off Sebastiene’s rail network two days ago. He didn’t notice, but I did. Wondered where it might have got to.’

Another sharp blast and a metal hole the size of a dustbin lid blew out the side of one of the compartments.

‘He’s after me,’ said the Doctor. He looked at his double lying in the mud. ‘Us. He won’t mind taking us both to get the right one. We’d better bring him.’

Together, they lifted the prone Baris. He gurgled and spat but didn’t manage full consciousness.

‘Who is this guy?’ asked Donna. ‘And where are we going? Answers in reverse order, please.’

The Doctor hefted his duplicate onto one of his shoulders. ‘Blimey, I’m heavy. Grab the other arm.’

‘Doctor?’

‘First question last: we’re heading into what’s left of the hotel to hide. Our pursuer is a desperately humourless torturer called Commissar Weimark, who will enjoy taking his time over killing us. By my reckoning, we’ve probably got five minutes to find a way out of this impregnable prison zone. Second question first: his name’s Baris, and he’s my number one fan.’

There was more metal banging from the train so the Doctor and Donna got a move on.

The journey had been long, boring and entirely free of incident. Commissar Weimark had enjoyed it immensely. For the first time in years, his life was not in danger of random annihilation by bullet, rocket, mine or bomb. The precarious day-to-day existence in the Beriagrad Warzone suited his character, but there was, he realised, something to be said for the quiet life.

Still, there was the Doctor to think about. Weimark hadn’t a clue how he was supposed to track his quarry down across a whole planet. He needed to find out what was going on in the world. Was he doomed to ride this train for ever?

The speeding train carriage carried no communication devices that Weimark could find. He tried talking to his robot squad, but the soldiers had dropped into some sort

of standby mode. They sat still, eyes closed, propped against the bouncing carriage walls. Their lack of pretence unnerved the Commissar.

After a day or so, the Commissar had a thought. He could just give up the game. Why not?

Sebastiene was not playing fair and, strictly speaking, this kind of time off from his real work was soon going to annoy his superiors in Beria. Letting the Doctor go would be an affront to his pride, but he could live with that.

There was always the possibility that Sebastiene was up to something. What if this safari for the Doctor was not what it seemed? What if the whole point of this exercise was actually to trap someone entirely different? For the sake of argument, let's say a highly important, supremely skilled and dangerous political officer.

Sniffing conspiracy, Weimark decided getting out was the sensible option.

The problem was that in this sealed compartment there was no way of communicating his intentions. 'What happened to Molecular Technology?' he asked himself.

'What happened to transmat here, there and everywhere?'

Then something extraordinary happened. The train engines increased their whining and the vehicle increased speed. Big time.

Also, Sergeant Laki perked up. It opened its eyes and looked at Weimark.

‘Commissar,’ it said in a strangely neutral voice. ‘We will be arriving in two minutes. You are advised to brace yourself.’

Suspicious, Weimark drew his pistol. ‘Why?’

‘This train will be crashing at that time. The impact will be severe.’

‘What game is Sebastiene playing?’ asked the Commissar. ‘Where are you taking me?’

Laki seemed dazed, his stubbled, weather-beaten face twitching, as if he was listening to a different voice entirely – one that existed only in his head. ‘This is no longer Sebastiene’s game,’ it said. ‘You are advised to utilise the safety harness.’ Laki looked up at Weimark. ‘I will now issue your instructions.’

Commissar Weimark listened, shocked by the robot’s tone. He listened and understood. And then the train crashed.

Excitement, tension, the thrill of the chase, these were a few of his favourite things. Oh yes, thought Sebastiene. He had spent too long cooped up in the Chateau worrying about screens and traitors and double crosses. Action was exactly the ticket to get him back into sorts. Get hunting

again; put a new exhibit in the Trophy Room. Why, he should never have bothered gathering the hunters at all; should have personally gone for the Doctor from the off. Sebastiene couldn't wait to see that smug, smiling stick insect cold and still and illuminated in his very own spotlight.

That would stop him worrying how Weimark's train had got off the network grid.

The atmosphere craft had not been in the air for over a year but, thanks to constant maintenance by the robots, Sebastiene could not tell. Shaped like a boomerang, its tiny but powerful jets were almost silent as they compacted and ejected air at an incredible rate. The land below flowed past like liquid.

'I should do this more often,' Sebastiene said aloud.

His eyes, augmented by Planet 1 surgical techniques, were impeccable. They were digitally aligned with the sights of his Tauran Hunting Revolver, meaning he was always a lethal shot without the tiresome bother of having to practise.

Bored, he flopped into his padded seat. The atmosphere craft was automatic, so he didn't even have to pilot the thing. He thought briefly about taking control and then decided his mission to capture the Doctor was too

important.

The landscape below never failed to fascinate Sebastiene. When was the last time he had taken a decent tour of Planet 1? He had re-shaped the place so often he could hardly remember what it looked like himself. Half the zones he sculpted were never completed. He quickly lost interest after the initial burst of excitement had got a project on the go.

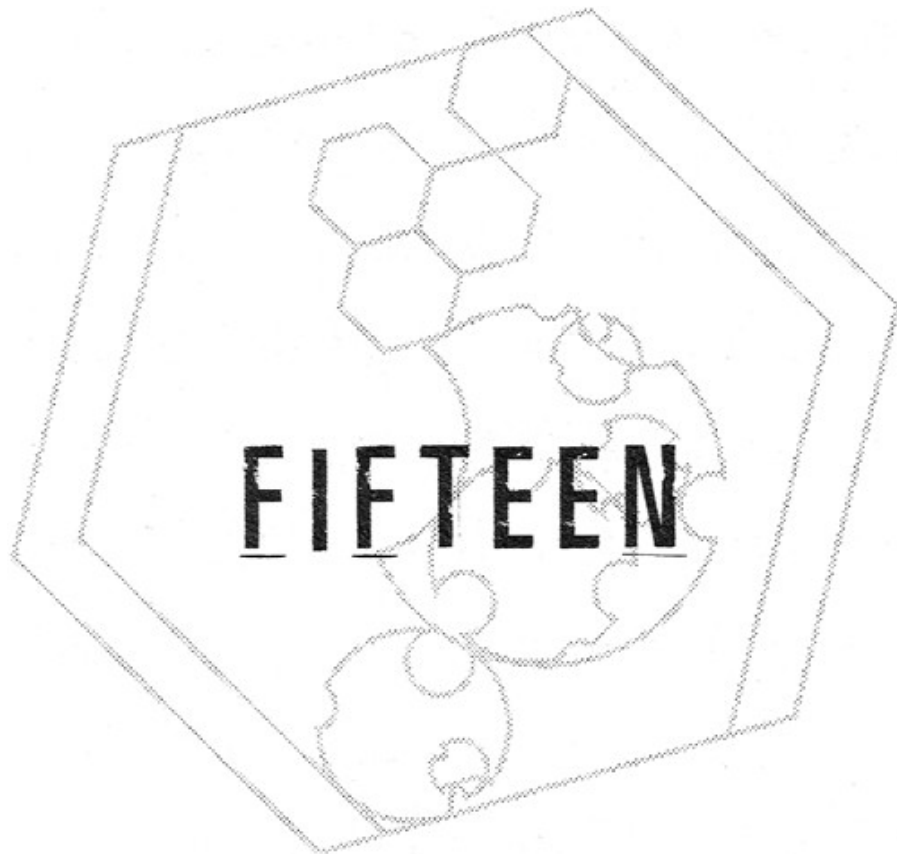
Planet 1 looked very different now. Communication and power masts were strung along the surface like lines of string. Bursts of white and blue lightning were gathered into unbelievably powerful electrical exchanges – channelling pure energy into almost infinite-capacity generators below the planet's surface. Planet 1 used more power in a week than most solar systems did in a generation.

Sebastiene sat back and chewed on his perfect fingernails. All this for him. He liked that. He liked seeing the millions of robots down below as they trudged and toiled without rest. The sight put his worries into perspective.

What could the Doctor do against him; really? OK, let him mess about with a train, but that was as far as he was going.

Sebastiene had him, had him and Baris in an unbreakable prison zone. One train wasn't going to breach the molecular skein that held the area separate. The skein was a leech; that was its strength. You could throw any form of energy at the defences and they would absorb that energy to reinforce themselves. As for getting out: no. Not possible. Only he could walk out of a Planet 1 exclusion zone. Some laws could not be broken. The Doctor, Baris and Donna were in there for good. And he and the hunters were on their way.

From all corners of Planet 1 they came. The members of the Society for Endangered Dangerous Species were bored and fractious and had waited too long. They wanted blood, and they were damn sure they were going to get it. In the Chateau control room, the Butler observed the trains as they converged on their designated zone. The huge robot kept another eye on Sebastiene's atmosphere craft. And across Planet 1, millions of robots went about their business. All was proceeding exactly according to plan.



If Commissar Weimark was aware of any rain, he certainly didn't let on. In fact, he found the temperate weather of this pretend Bracknell uncomfortably warm, wrapped as he was in his leather armour. His only concession to the humidity was to unwrap the scarf from around his mouth and loosen the top button of his great coat. His used the infra-red sights on his rifle to scan for thermal signals. People.

The reading was indeterminate. There was too much heat from the train wreck.

Weimark climbed out from the carriage and onto a pile

of rubble. He did not note that the ruins on which he stood had once been a bland hotel. He would not have cared anyway.

He whistled and the rest of the squad climbed out from the wreckage.

Something had broken in one male soldier's head. The skull kept dropping backwards between its shoulder blades. Internal gears whined in a wrong kind of way as the mechanical muscles hauled it up on its neck again. The soldier staggered out of the hole in the carriage and stumbled on the bricks. Inevitably, it slipped and tumbled all the way down.

'Sorry, sir,' it said from the grass.

'No problem, Private,' Weimark replied and blew the robot apart with an explosive bullet. Laki and the two remaining soldiers looked on.

'Now then,' the Commissar continued, 'let's find the Doctor and kill him.'

Careful not to slip, Weimark made his way down the brick slope.

A light winked on the dashboard. The atmosphere craft was on approach, through the exclusion-zone barrier and into descent. Sebastiene expected that the other hunters had already arrived. No matter.

He checked his appearance in the mirror. Dark was the motif he had selected for this final round with the Doctor. Accordingly, he had darkened his moustache black. He had also changed into a very fetching Edwardian grey frock coat; a clergyman's collar (he just couldn't resist), and a fetching black top hat with matching brass goggles. He felt every inch the hunter. 'You'll do,' he whispered, seeing an irresistibly wicked glint in his eye.

The atmosphere craft touched down with theatrical steamy hisses and extra-extending landing gear, just for effect. Sebastiene loaded up and waited for the hatch to open. He hefted his stylish brass-finish revolver in his right hand, selected and twirled the stylish wooden hunting stick in his left, and took a deep breath. The real game was on. 'Much more like it,' he said to his reflection. 'What a relief.'

In the still-standing wing of the Exquisite Traveller, the Doctor and Donna carted Baris up a set of fire stairs. 'So we're safer up here, are we?' asked Donna. The crash combined with the effort of dragging an unconscious man had taken the wind out of her. 'Not really, no,' the Doctor replied.

'Then why are we going?'

'I like stairs. And the Commissar being a thorough man

will undoubtedly start at the bottom and work his way up.

Maybe give us some time.'

'Maybe we'll tire him out, all those steps,' Donna chuckled, hoisting the dead weight of Baris up another step.

'Maybe he's stair-phobic.'

An explosion rocked the wing.

'Or he could just blow up the hotel,' the Doctor concluded.

Baris groaned as they hauled him through the fire doors and into a corridor. 'Come on, mush,' Donna snapped.

'This is hurting.'

She fell to her knees on the carpeted floor. 'Can't go on,' she said. 'Too tired.'

The Doctor hoisted Baris up, holding an arm against the wall to take the weight. He looked around and licked his lips. 'Into a room. Maybe he won't blow it up just yet. 304 – does that sound like the kind of room you'd fire a mortar shell into?'

Donna knelt, catching her breath. 'You just need a few minutes, don't you, to... to work out a way to escape, yeah?'

The Doctor thumped Baris against the door and barged it open. 'Oh no,' he said absently. 'This place has a

molecular barrier. No way to get out; not even for me.'

Donna sagged. 'So we're finished then. That bloke's gonna kill us.'

The Doctor smiled. 'Looks that way, doesn't it. Unless we get him first, of course.'

'What with?' she snapped. 'Courtesy soap?'

'There's always a way,' he replied, serious again.

'Come on.'

The room was the same as all the others. The Doctor dropped the moaning, mud-caked Baris onto the bland bed.

Donna thumped the door shut and didn't look at her hideous reflection in the mirror. Instead, she looked at Baris.

'We could, you know, hand him over,' she said.

'Pretend he's you.'

'What?' the Doctor sounded outraged. He ducked down and crawled to the smashed window frame. The air smelled of burning oil.

'Well, he did frame us both. Bring us here to be killed.'

The Doctor held a finger to his lips, hearing something she couldn't.

'Yes, I've been thinking about that. Something

Sebastiene said to me about Baris.'

‘What?’

‘Well, Sebastiene just could not accept that I could be the real Doctor; that Baris and I might have swapped places.’

‘It does seem a little far-fetched,’ Donna said.

‘Oh come on, even his robot servants worked it out.

But Sebastiene insisted that out of all possible explanations, me being Baris was actually impossible. I wonder why he thought that? Highly unlikely I grant you, but given my genius, my ability to triumph...’

‘Yeah yeah,’ she interrupted. ‘You’re you, all right.’

He looked at her. ‘So you have accepted that?’

Donna shrugged. ‘Don’t think I’ve got much choice.

It’s you or the unconscious one, so I damn well hope you are the real Doctor.’

‘So much for women’s instinct...’

‘Yeah, I’d leave it if I were you. Get back to the explanation.’

There came a loud crump from downstairs.

‘Concussion grenade,’ said the Doctor. ‘They’re in the building.’

Donna felt sick. ‘Oh yeah.’

Again, the Doctor seemed to find this fact highly entertaining.

‘And you haven’t yet thought of an escape plan.’

‘Nope. Not a chance.’

‘Better keep telling me the story then.’

The Doctor nodded. ‘I felt insulted. And mystified.

Why would it be so impossible for me to get the better of Baris back at Snowcap? Especially as the boy spent so much time gloating. A child could have—’ He broke off and looked at Baris.

‘What?’ asked Donna.

She saw that the Doctor was about to start that little dance thing he did whenever he had a really big idea. He started to shake. She gestured at him to stay down. He rolled his eyes. ‘Of course!’

He frog-legged his way to the bed. His image, his double, was starting to come round. There was a nasty-looking cut on his forehead, but apart from that Donna suspected most of the damage was concussion from the crash. Baris would live.

‘What? What is it?’ she asked.

The Doctor crawled onto the bed and looked at Baris.

He stroked his hair. ‘You brave little idiot,’ he said.

More explosions sounded from down below. This

Commissar wasn’t taking any chances. ‘I don’t get it,’ said Donna.

‘My number one fan,’ whispered the Doctor. ‘The clue’s in the title. Baris didn’t want me captured or killed. He didn’t want to be me. Maybe he wanted to try out being me, see what it was like for a while, but you don’t kill your heroes.’

‘Cast all modesty aside for a moment, Doctor,’ said Donna.

‘Not unless you’re a total moron. Oh yes, Baris was tempted. Sebastiene is pretty good at temptation.’ She remembered the beautiful man and the honeyed words. ‘Yeah, I remember.’

‘The offer was too good to refuse. He went through the surgical procedures, the DNA transfusion, but that would have been enough for him. The idea that he was going to be used to hunt me down was too much.’

Donna thought she was catching on. ‘He couldn’t do a runner...’

‘Not on Planet 1. Sebastiene would have been watching him all the time.’

‘So he thought up a way to swap places, to give you a chance.’

The Doctor nodded. He looked at Baris with admiration. ‘He knows me better than anyone, except perhaps those who have travelled with me.’

‘Hang on,’ Donna insisted. ‘Don’t even think I know you.’

‘You’ll learn. You’re young. He knew that if you gloat at me, I’ll punish you for it. He wanted me to hypnotise him and swap places. Maybe he even wanted me to think he was... a... well, a villain. If I knew his real motives, that he wasn’t really a bad guy, I wouldn’t have the heart to send him to the hunting zones.’

Baris’s eyes were flickering in their sockets. His mouth uttered a disturbingly Doctorish groan.

‘That’s a real risk,’ said Donna.

‘Huge,’ said the Doctor. ‘And that’s what Sebastiene couldn’t understand. What he wouldn’t accept. Sebastiene is a paranoid sociopath. For him, killing your heroes would be everything. Anything less would seem insane.

Oh Baris, why would you do that for me?’

Baris looked up at him. ‘You’re the Doctor. You want to try living in Apartment 4589/DYY Block N in Proxima City’s Second District for twenty years. You and everyone else exactly like you; nothing changing, nothing happening. And then I get offered the chance to be the Doctor. Wow! I’d do it all again if I had to.’

‘Here, sit up,’ said the Doctor. ‘Get him some water.’

‘From where? The taps ain’t working.’

‘Anywhere. Sit up, Baris, there’s a good fellow. You do know you’re Baris, don’t you?’

Baris gave the Doctor a bleary smile. ‘I knew you’d get me out of those zones.’

‘Well, I didn’t have a lot of time to hypnotise you properly. That beepy stick thing you had was good but didn’t come with any instructions. All I could do was give you the ‘Find Donna’ command; program it to loop in if your real personality started to come through, and send you on your way. I didn’t do half of the rescuing. You made it easy for me. I understand now why I got away with messing about with the computer so much. You’re a real forward thinker, Baris. Give yourself a pat on the back.’

‘What do you mean?’ asked Baris. ‘Oh, and can I have your autograph?’

‘Later. I mean those twiddles and override wotsits you put into the computer system to help me work it so easily. Thought my number was up when the big Supervisor tracked me down.’

‘Not me.’

The Doctor smiled. ‘You’re concussed still. Rest easy, you’ve had a busy day.’

Baris clutched his shoulder. ‘It wasn’t me. I don’t know

how to operate the Planet 1 computer system. Sebastiene wouldn't let me near it. Why would he?

The Doctor's eyebrows squiggled, like they did when he was confused.

Donna handed him a cup of water. 'Don't ask me where I got it,' she said.

Cold air was seeping into the room now from the smashed window. The explosions downstairs had stopped.

The Doctor was still thinking as he drank the water.

Baris stifled a laugh.

'That wasn't for you,' said Donna.

The Doctor gulped. He stared at the cup in his hand like it came from another planet. 'There's someone else,' he said.

Commissar Weimark took a while to work out what was unnerving him, but he got there in the end. There was no background noise. There was rain, yes, but nothing...

nothing lived here. Nothing at all. Even the icy ruins of Beriagrad managed to sustain a few birds and rats, those which avoided being eaten, and when you had lived there as long as Weimark had, you always heard them. They were your guide and your warning system; their life rhythm woven into your fabric. This place had nothing. Even the grass felt wrong.

Weimark did not concern himself with this knowledge.

He had long learned to ignore any data that did not aid him in the hunt. If the lack of noise became important, he would register its existence; otherwise forget it.

The building must once have been a barracks or meeting house, consisting as it did of identical living units. His prey was hiding inside. There was nowhere else for them to go.

‘Inside!’ he shouted, and his squad followed him across the churned-up gravel of the old car park.

Something moved in a puddle, and Weimark instinctively fired a shot. Sadie’s robotic hand burst into a thousand fragments. The Commissar allowed a tight smile across his white face. Nice at last to shoot something.

Suddenly his day seemed a lot brighter.

The robot squad reached the ruined door. Weimark read a battered gold sign: ‘Exquisite Traveller’.

He nodded. The Doctor.

Weimark pointed at a soldier, a woman. ‘Stay outside.

Use your motion detector to mark them if they try to slip out.’

He and Laki and the other private searched the rooms on the ground floor. They grenaded and flamed wherever they went. Weimark was impressed. The robots’ combat

programming was as efficient as that of a real Eastern

Mark soldier.

Once satisfied no one was downstairs, Weimark and Sergeant Laki took a staircase each. The private remained on the ground floor, to catch any runners.

The Doctor and his allies had taken the coward's option. They preferred to run than stand their ground. A fatal mistake. Statistically a cornered combatant, even an unarmed combatant, stood a thirty-two per cent better chance of survival if he confronted his pursuer. Retreat was the worst course of action.

Two stairwells led up to a single corridor. Closed doors lined that corridor. His prey was behind one of those doors.

Laki whistled from the far stairwell. The sergeant held out a hand to indicate his presence. Weimark whistled back.

Together, they moved onto the carpet and kicked in their first doors.

Wood splintered under heavy blows. Somewhere down the corridor, a gun blasted.

Donna looked at the Doctor. 'So, escape plan?'

The Doctor was fiddling with the air-conditioning controls. 'Can't you think of something? I'm busy.'

As Donna looked disbelievingly at Baris, he continued.

‘Is it me, or is it getting cold in here?’

‘He’ll find a way,’ said the duplicate. ‘He always does.’

Another crump from a grenade.

‘They’re getting clo-ser,’ Donna sang.

She looked around but the room was the same.

Bathroom door: closed. Window: broken. Telly: off.

Nothing else.

She shivered. ‘Doctor!’

At last, he stopped fiddling. ‘You know what’s bothering me?’

‘That there’s thirty seconds before hunters kick the door in and spray us with bullets?’

‘That distress signal. You know; the really loud one.’

Baris was smiling. ‘He’s thinking. He’s doing his thinking face. Can you put your glasses on? What do you call them: your clever glasses? Can you do that?’

‘Brainy specs. And shut up.’ Donna felt only mildly hysterical. ‘Can we do distress signals another time?’

A thump. Much closer.

‘Ooh they’re right on us,’ said Baris, looking at the Doctor with happy expectation. ‘I wonder what he’s going to come up with.’

A draught of freezing air shot from under the bathroom

door. The Doctor snapped his fingers. 'I've got it!' He stopped to listen. 'Is there a fly in here?'

Donna held her breath and her patience. 'I can't hear anything.'

'That's no fly... that's robotic...' Baris climbed off the bed. He looked at the Doctor, who looked at him. They both grimaced.

Donna lost it. She put her hands on her hips, leaned her head back and yelled. 'Oi! What is going on?'

The Doctors' mouths opened in toothy surprise.

'Ssshh!' they hissed.

Baris blinked. 'I know what to do,' he said. 'For the first time in my life, I know what to do.' He dashed to the door and pulled it open. 'Make sure you get away.'

'Baris, no!' The Doctor ran forward, only for Donna to jump on him. Together, they bowled into the wall.

'Go on!' she yelled. 'Get going!'

Baris gave Donna a frightened wink. 'I'm a hero!' he said. 'Maybe they'll look me up on the neural net. Me. Baris.'

He darted into the corridor and slammed the door shut.

'Baris!' the Doctor shouted. He shoved Donna aside.

They heard Baris yell: 'Come get me! Come get me you scum!' There was an explosion, gunfire and then

quiet. He was gone.

The Doctor jumped up to follow. Donna pinned him down on the bed. 'Leave him!'

The Doctor stopped wriggling. He glared at Donna.

'Why?'

She grabbed his hand to keep him still. 'That was what he wanted, can't you see? He wanted to be the Doctor. To do what you would do. He wanted to be you.'

He stared at her. Accusing.

'Don't...' she said. 'I feel rotten enough.'

'Door,' said the Doctor and looked at the bathroom door.

'What?'

The Doctor freed his hand and stood up. 'It's time to go.'

He opened the bathroom door and Donna gasped.

They had him cold. In the split second before being shot dead, a small part of his brain bathed in his bravery. At last, he was the Doctor.

Except, unlike the real Doctor, he wasn't going to overturn the odds and pull through. In fact, his plan relied on his being killed.

Baris recalled his dull, grey suburban existence back on Proxima. The years of dreaming. Comfortable, safe, but

not enough. Not nearly enough. Here on Planet 1, Baris had just made a difference. The Doctor and Donna were safe because of him. He was their Doctor.

Ahead, a soldier stepped out from a room. His face was impassive as he blocked any escape.

Baris was aware of fear growing cold in his stomach.

Even that fear felt right. He found he wanted to remember the details of this moment: the sound of flames, the dreadful weave of the carpet, the smell of the thick smoky air.

The fly that wasn't a fly buzzed in Baris's ear. The soldier raised his rifle and aimed. Baris didn't care. 'You wouldn't be the first,' he said. 'Go on then.'

The fly noise whipped by his ear to the man holding the rifle. As Baris waited for death, the soldier flinched and his robotic head blew up.

Weimark cursed. Once again luck was against him. The Doctor had run to Laki and not to him. The Commissar ran out of the burning room to see the sergeant all set to gun his target down. Despite having given the order, Weimark was disappointed. He would not personally be the man to get the last Time Lord. Trapped in the corridor, the Doctor could only wait for the bullet.

Except that, for no reason whatsoever, Laki's head

burst apart.

Sparks and metal and fluid flew in all directions in a halo of energy. The sergeant dropped his rifle, staggered and tumbled. The Doctor looked as surprised as anyone. He turned, saw Weimark and ran.

Weimark raised his weapon. He heard an insect's buzz and saw a tiny ripple in the air heading straight at him. He threw himself to one side, still managing a snap shot at the retreating Doctor. The bullet blew a chunk out of the wall, but that was the extent of its damage. The Doctor disappeared round the corner and down the stairs.

The buzz grew louder again. Some kind of miniature missile. Tiny but devastating if it went off in the right place – say a neck or a head. Someone had some interesting toys.

Weimark rolled and listened for the buzz. He concentrated on its sound and, as it swooped, he pulled his pistol and fired. The air in front of the Commissar burst into flame, its expanding fire washing over him. Weimark blinked at the pain and slapped his burning face with his gloved hands. He had hit the micro-missile at the last vital second.

‘Damn you!’ he yelled as he rubbed his eyes. Water poured from the dark sockets. His skull felt singed raw.

Weimark blinked the tears away. Ignoring the pain, he picked himself up.

Commissar Weimark was going to get that Doctor, if it was the last thing he ever did.

Giddy with excitement, almost wetting himself with terror and laughing like a loon, Baris bounced down the stairs.

The smashed windows blew rain and wind over him, and the thick patterned carpet squelched beneath his feet.

He had escaped after all. Heaven only knew what he was going to do next, but he had escaped.

A second soldier appeared at the foot of the stairs. Yet another gun was pointed at him.

Super-confident now, Baris jumped out of the first-floor window.

He dropped head first towards a mound of bricks. They looked very hard and although some distance below, approached very quickly.

At this point, he was willing to accept that perhaps he had been just a little too confident. Being the Doctor had gone to his head – a situation that was about to be rather brutally rectified. Baris held his arms out in a futile attempt to cushion the impact, knowing already he was doomed.

Energy hummed around him and, as he should have hit

the bricks, he bounced as if he had landed on an invisible trampoline.

Baris cartwheeled down the brick slope, cocooned in a flickering blue light. He was caught in an energy bubble.

‘There you are, old chap,’ said a voice Baris had not heard in a long time.

Sebastiene, resplendent in his new black hunting outfit, was manipulating his bracelet. The energy bubble rolled down the rubble slope to stop at Sebastiene’s feet, next to another dead robot soldier. ‘Game over,’ said the hunter. Wriggling himself upright, aware that rain was sliding down the bubble around him, Baris tried to clear his head. Even the Doctor didn’t face death three times in one minute. Well, not normally.

‘You’ve proved quite a challenge,’ said Sebastiene.

‘Jolly good for you.’ He smiled a deep, white-toothed smile.

Baris collected his thoughts. ‘Wrong one,’ he said. ‘I’m Baris.’

A flicker of irritation crossed Sebastiene’s perfect face. He was thinking through the possibilities. ‘Nice try,’ he said. ‘But we’re done. Baris only looks like the Doctor; he doesn’t act like him. Did you like my midge-missiles?’

Baris smiled. ‘You don’t know anything. Something

has happened. There's another player. We're all being manipulated. Especially you.'

Sebastiene blinked in the rain. He tapped his bracelet.

'Prepare to open the zone,' he commanded. 'I'm in charge here, Baris. I've always been in charge here and don't you forget it...'

Baris heard a metallic click. Sebastiene's chest erupted and the ruler of Planet 1 was hurled into the mud, hat flying off. He clutched the ground; fingers digging into the earth in shock. 'Now that's damned inconvenient,' Sebastiene sighed and stopped moving.

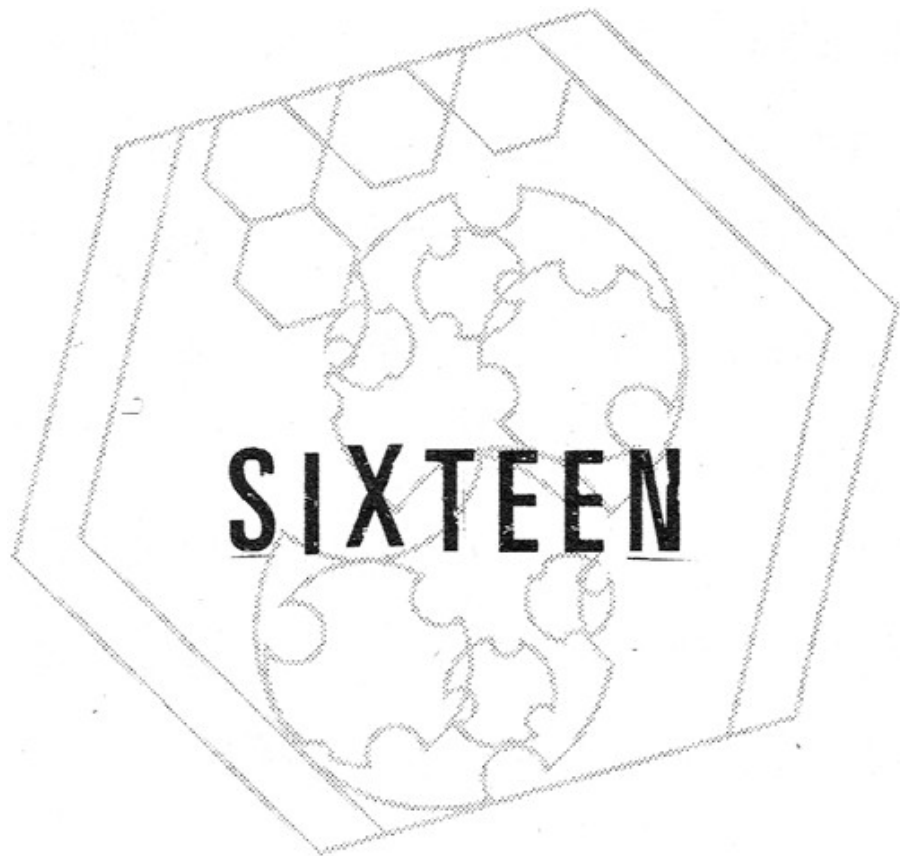
The bubble around Baris fizzed and he rolled over.

Upside down, he saw the hotel and the white blob of a face leaning out from a window. Commissar Weimark ejected the spent cartridge from his rifle and punched the air; the first emotion Baris had ever seen in his pursuer.

'I win!' screamed the Commissar. 'I win!'

Baris then heard a cluster of buzzing sounds, saw

Commissar Weimark flap at his face, and the whole building exploded.



‘How could you know?’ Donna demanded. ‘No one could possibly know.’

‘What do you mean? Know what?’

‘Come on, you planned the whole escape all along.’

‘I didn’t plan anything.’ The Doctor stopped and wiped frozen moisture from his face. ‘It wasn’t that hard to figure out.’

‘That you open a door in a Bracknell hotel bathroom and boom: there’s the Antarctic? Drifts, glaciers, crevasses, the works? Do I look stupid?’

They were trudging through snow again. The Doctor

was determined; he was on a mission.

Donna still wasn't sure he had forgiven her for the fight in the bedroom. She wasn't sure she forgave herself. 'If I'd let you stop Baris, he'd have come through the door with us. He'd still be alive, wouldn't he?'

The Doctor stopped and smiled. 'Like you said, he did what he wanted to do. It's not your fault.'

'How was I supposed to know?' she moaned.

'You just had to think it through,' he said. 'I thought it through.'

Donna grabbed him. She was now freezing and was astounded how warm he felt. 'Look, this is the Antarctic, right? Where we first appeared?'

'Well...'

'There's a base around here with a big scary monster in it, right? It's Earth, yeah?'

The Doctor took a deep breath. 'There's a base with a big scary monster somewhere... but this is not the Earth. It never was.'

Never mind the cold. She stopped and poked his chest.

'Explanation,' she demanded. 'In English. Right now.'

The Doctor smiled. 'You'll freeze to death standing there looking all stern.'

'I don't care. Tell me. And don't give me that "there's

not a moment to lose”. If this ain’t the Earth, where on Earth are we?’

The Doctor gave Donna his special ‘let-me-off’ look but she wasn’t having any of it. ‘And don’t give me that handsome face ’cos it don’t work on me, mister.’

He put his hands in his pockets and kicked some snow.

‘You never quite grasped the fact that you weren’t in Bracknell, did you? Be honest.’

‘Was I asking about Bracknell? If this ain’t the South Pole, where is it?’

‘Planet 1,’ he said. ‘Can we go now?’ He pointed. ‘Ah, there’s a chimney.’

By now, Donna’s teeth were chattering so hard she could hardly speak. ‘W-w-what’s Planet W-w-w-won?’

‘Sebastiene’s planet.’

‘You said we were on Earth. I distinctly heard you say it. In the TARDIS.’

The Doctor looked hurt. ‘He fooled me. I don’t know how, but he fooled me. I don’t like that. Let’s get you warm.’

The snow next to them burst into flame. Donna and the Doctor pitched over into the snow. Donna screeched with shock.

‘I didn’t mean it literally!’ she heard the Doctor shout.

‘Donna, stay down!’

‘Who was that?’ she asked.

‘Hunter.’ He crawled to her, looking around. ‘I imagine Sebastiene has called them all here in the hope that—’

The snow exploded again. The Doctor flinched as he was showered with wet, white powder. ‘Long way off and trying to scare not kill. We need to get inside.’

Donna grabbed his wet arm. ‘There’s a monster in that base!’

He smiled. ‘Yes, but I contained it in a sonic stasis field. Ah, there’s the hatch. Come on!’

He hauled her up just as the third explosion rocked the ground.

Colonel Sty of the Bolken Context brushed the snow off his thick hide. As the cold did not affect him, he had decided to use his thick rubbery skin as an advantage and dig in. He had hoped to capture the Doctor before the Time Lord went underground.

Colonel Sty looked at his rifle. The weapon must be malfunctioning. He did not comprehend. The computer inside calculated every possible force that would affect the explosive bullet’s trajectory, be it range, wind speed or atmospheric pressure. The rifle was even vacuum sealed to enable space firing. He should have hit the Doctor three

times.

Not daunted, Colonel Sty snapped the expensive weapon in half. He threw the pieces into the snow. 'We'll do this the old-fashioned way.' He unsheathed his Krat dagger and stood up. 'Hello old friend,' he said, remembering the blood he had taken with it. Colonel Sty of the Bolken Context began to march.

As he did so, Zzorg Zero, who was hovering over the Colonel, dropped a plasma bead onto his striding head and blew his fellow Society member to smithereens.

'One lesszz,' the creature buzzed and landed in the snow.

The Doctor let Donna climb down the Snowcap Base ladder first. Which was unlucky for her as her feet triggered an energy net on the steps. A sticky metal web enveloped her. Struggling, she fell and hit the ruined tiles on the floor with a crunch.

The Doctor looked down into the gloomy base. Hands yanked Donna out of view. They intended to use her as a hostage. Sebastiene had summoned the hunters here to wrap the game up.

Well, that was just fine.

The Doctor stood in the cold light, snow swirling around him. 'All right,' he said. 'No more running.'

Nothing. No movement or sound of any kind. He felt as if Planet 1 itself was holding its breath.

‘One warning!’ the Doctor shouted. ‘Leave now or never leave.’

He climbed slowly; each tread deliberate and solid. The metal ladder rang with his footsteps. His plimsolls splashed onto the puddled floor. Snowcap Base was dark, the emergency strip lights smashed either by Sebastiene’s monster or a hunter seeking cover.

They were hiding in the shadows; he could sense them. They were watching and waiting.

‘Never leave, then,’ he told the dark. ‘The Society for Endangered Dangerous Species? You’re the endangered species now. I’ve destroyed worlds, civilisations; my own people. So run; run and hide because now I’m hunting you. Fear me. I’m the Doctor and I’m coming for you. All of you.’

He turned and pointed the sonic screwdriver up at the hatch. Zzorg Zero, who had crept up to the edge, screamed in pain as the reinforced metal lid dropped onto his front legs. Pieces of insect feet floated down. Pinned by the immense weight, Zzorg Zero squirmed and wailed, his wings thrashing feebly against metal.

The Doctor twisted the sonic screwdriver. A great roar

erupted deep inside Snowcap Base. The sonic field holding Sebastiene's monster was gone. 'I'm coming,' he said. 'And hell's coming with me.'

The Doctor walked into the darkness.

The Society for Endangered Dangerous Species fled in terror. Their plans, their lures, were in disarray. What had they been thinking? To take on the Doctor? Madness.

How had they allowed Sebastiene to fool them into believing they could trap him? And now there was no way out.

They ran anyway.

Two hunters collided in a scramble for an exit and shoved blades into each other before they had time to think. Three more ran straight down into the lower levels, where Sebastiene's pet Thing eagerly received them.

Only one hunter kept a cool head. This final hunter was either arrogant or stupid enough to believe it could still win the game. The trick was to keep waiting. Wait until exactly the right time.

The Doctor walked the tunnels of this fake Snowcap Base. He never faltered and never turned aside. He walked until he found Donna.

'Doctor?' she asked, crumpled up in the energy net and shoved into a crack in the floorboards.

His face was in shadow as he leaned towards her.

‘You look different...’ she said, suddenly afraid.

Only when he appeared in the light, he was all smiles.

‘Donna. Donna Noble. I’m really glad to know you.’

He cut the net apart with the sonic screwdriver and helped her to her feet.

‘What did you do?’ she asked.

The Doctor shrugged. ‘The Society disbanded.’

She hugged him, although she wasn’t quite sure why.

‘So what do we do now?’ she asked. ‘Sit round a camp fire and “be there” for each other?’

They walked through the wrecked remains of Snowcap Base. Nothing moved here now. Even the monster had gone. Well, Donna hoped it had gone. The Doctor led her down stairs and along corridors until they found a seriously mashed-up laboratory with what looked like a hollowed-out ice cube rapidly melting over a table.

Donna could see all too clearly what had happened.

The creature inside the ice cube had lurched straight upwards, smashing a hole in the ceiling. It must have been one hell of a fight. There wasn’t a single item of equipment in here that wasn’t wrecked.

‘What happened to the men? You know: the guys who lived here?’

The Doctor dropped the twisted, wiry internal heart of a computer onto the floor, knelt down, put on his brainy specs and began to work. ‘There weren’t any men. Just robots. Sebastiene’s toys. Like all spoilt little boys, breaking his toys is easy because he knows he’ll just get bought some more. Snowcap Base and the ice creature were just bait for his ridiculous safari. The worm to tempt us onto the fishing line. Or should that be fishing hook?’ He shook his head. ‘What a rubbish lure. I can think of a billion less complicated and more effective ways to reel me in.’

Donna knelt down in front of the wiring. ‘What’s that? A lash-up? An improvised wotsit to signal the TARDIS?’ The Doctor threw the machine away. ‘Nah, I was trying to get Radio 2. We’re just waiting for Sebastiene. I want a word with him.’

He must have seen how much his words had deflated her, because he plonked a half-broken beaker onto a twisted tripod. He reached into his jacket and produced a little paper packet, which he waggled in front of her. ‘See if you can find some water,’ he said. ‘I’ll make us a cup of tea.’

The night passed slowly. At least, Donna guessed it was night; she couldn’t really tell. Night just seemed to suit the

way time went in Snowcap Base. And it went slowly.

‘Who is Sebastiene?’ she asked, when the Doctor had woken her up for the third time with his infernal fidgeting.

‘I mean, I don’t know at all. He told me he was a scientist from Earth in 1973. That wasn’t true, was it?’

The Doctor watched her stretch and yawn and listened to the cracks in her vertebrae as she stretched her spine.

‘Perhaps he was,’ he replied. ‘Once. But you know how these legends are. I mean, every planet’s got a legend about Sebastiene and Planet 1.’

‘I haven’t. I mean, we haven’t.’

‘Every civilised planet. You lot are too busy watching *Jamie’s Home Cooking* to take any notice of what’s actually going on the universe. Mind you, he does run up a mean pasta bake.’

‘Sebastiene?’

‘Jamie! I remember this party in Tuscany...’

‘Doctor!’

The Doctor rubbed his chin. ‘I don’t think Sebastiene really knows who he is himself. He thinks he does; but he doesn’t. He said something to me once; he said: ‘I am incapable of taking anything at face value’. I didn’t think anything of it at the time but now I’m not so sure.’

‘What do you mean?’

The Doctor laughed. 'He simply couldn't accept that I could have switched places with Baris at the Chateau. That thinking was beyond him. There had to be a hidden plan... the Doctor Trap. I think Sebastiene *literally* cannot accept anything at face value. He's not made that way.'

It took a moment, but Donna got there. 'Made that way?'

'We're all made in some way or another. Drink your tea. I don't want to say until I'm sure.'

'Doctor?' she asked. 'What is the Doctor Trap? There's no such thing, is there? You made it up, right?'

He took a gulp of tea. 'Of course there's a Doctor Trap.'

'What is it then?'

'Donna,' he said. 'It's the nagging doubt. The Doctor Trap is what you think they know and you don't. It's being sure the other person is getting one over on you.'

'So it's what they know and you don't.'

'No. It's what you think they know. It's what you think they've got over you. The Doctor Trap. I'm rather proud of having coined the phrase, now I come to think of it.'

'How about the door in the hotel?' she asked. 'Come on. And who is this other person you mentioned? You know, the one who you think is really controlling

everything?’

‘I didn’t say it was a person.’ His voice was mock-mysterious; full of humour. The Doctor looked up at the ruined ceiling and yelled. ‘Come on, Sebastiene! Bored!’ Nothing. The silence was so great Donna thought she could hear the blizzard raging a hundred metres overhead. ‘You’re enjoying this,’ she said, realising it was true.

There came a metallic clang from above. Donna shrieked. ‘Someone’s coming!’

The Doctor dusted himself down. He took off his brainy specs. ‘About time,’ he said. ‘Let’s go to work.’

A man walked in through the ruined doorway.

‘Been waiting for you,’ said the Doctor. He lay on a damaged table, scrutinising the ceiling.

Sebastiene was smiling. He was dressed in dark clothes now, with a black wide-brimmed hat. He held a strange brass pistol. Donna had to admit he looked mighty fine.

‘So, here we are,’ he said. He looked at her. ‘Hello again, Donna Noble. No hard feelings?’

‘Get lost,’ she growled.

‘Hard feelings then. Oh well. Brought someone...’

He stood aside and the Doctor walked in, looking sheepish and forlorn. No, she had to remember. Baris. Donna could have died. ‘You made it!’ she squealed. ‘I

don't believe it!'

Baris did not reply. He looked frightened. Very frightened.

Sebastiene laughed. 'Lighten up! This is a party! We should have pop and cakes, isn't that how you do it in London, Donna?'

'What exactly are we celebrating?' she asked.

Sebastiene was inspecting the damaged room. 'Ouch,' he muttered. 'Someone really went to town, didn't they?' She saw what they were up to, the pair of them, Sebastiene and the Doctor. They were playing tough guys; pretending the other was too small to be a threat. Both as bad as each other.

'Celebrating?' Sebastiene continued. 'Why, the Doctor's triumph of course. Got to hand it to you, sir. You really are the bee's knees. The entire Society for Endangered Dangerous Species. I hoped you would best them, but I didn't really believe it.'

'He's scared,' said Baris. 'He's afraid of you, Doctor.' Sebastiene gave Baris a stare. 'Now, now, old chap. Behave. Or I may be forced to chastise you.' Baris cringed.

Sebastiene looked at the table where the Doctor was lying. 'What do you say? Back to the Chateau for a glass

of bubbly?’

The Doctor said nothing.

Sebastiene was still smiling but his eyes were cold and dark. ‘What’s up, old chap? You won, didn’t you?’

The Doctor did not look up. He seemed to be asleep; until he spoke. ‘Sorry, mate. I only speak to the organ grinder, not the monkey.’

Donna saw Sebastiene flinch. He had lost his temper but fought to conceal it. ‘I am the organ grinder. I could kill you instantly, of course.’

The Doctor swung himself off the table. ‘Well, you might have been able to once upon a time, but cleverly you switched off the Intelligent Molecular Technology. So no more point and click.’ He pointed a finger at Sebastiene and said: ‘Boom.’

Sebastiene raised his pistol. ‘All right,’ he said. ‘Let’s skip the pleasantries. The Trophy Room beckons.’

Baris took a step forward. ‘Doctor, Weimark shot him. Right in front of me. I saw him die...’

Sebastiene fired at Baris who glowed red, screamed in pain, then disappeared.

Donna let out a roar of anger and charged at Sebastiene. Amused, he rolled away and kicked her in the right knee. She dropped like a stone. Agonising fire shot

up her leg. She moaned.

‘Do shut up, there’s a good girl,’ said Sebastiene, dusting himself down.

Donna put out a hand. ‘Yeah, a little help here, please.’ She tried to move, but the Doctor glared at her. She got the message: stay down. For once in her life, she did what she was told. Whatever was going on here was beyond her. Be nice if they could give her something for her leg, though.

‘How do you know you got the right Doctor?’ asked the Doctor. ‘You might have killed the real one. Wouldn’t exactly be a successful end to the safari would it?’

‘He’s not dead. This gun gives me limited transmat capacity. I’ve just popped him off for a while. So even if he is the real you, I’ll have you both. I win whatever.’

‘So you were killed?’ The Doctor spoke as if Baris had confirmed a suspicion. ‘How d’you get over that then? Reincarnation?’

Sebastiene looked bored. ‘I rule Planet 1. I have lots of nice nano-technology inside that augments my body. Don’t ask me to explain it; far too boring. You think the planet would let me die? Look, I’d love to stand around and chat, but this really is a very dreary place and I’m dying to get you on display. Move.’

The Doctor stayed still. 'Why do you think Commissar Weimark shot you when he would have thought I was standing right next to you?'

Sebastiene shook his head. 'A little less conversation, a little more action... Bye-bye.' He held up the gun again and pulled the trigger.

Nothing happened.

Blinking, Sebastiene tried again. The gun still failed to fire.

The Doctor put his hands behind his back. 'You've already lost everything, and you still don't know it. Let me tell you why the Commissar hit you and not me. Well, Baris, really, but as good as...'

'Oh please,' said Sebastiene, starting to look flustered but fighting it. 'Enlighten me. Let me learn from you...'

'You were his target.'

Sebastiene snarled and threw the gun aside. 'All right, we'll do this the traditional way.' From his coat, Sebastiene produced a smaller, deadlier-looking pistol.

'You know what? I'm going to do something I should have done ages ago. Right or wrong Doctor, I'm just going to kill you, because I'm sick of hearing your voice.'

'I wouldn't,' said the Doctor. 'Because I think you're going to need my help.'

Sebastiene laughed. 'Oh, of course I will. I mean, I just run the planet and who... who are you?'

The Doctor sniffed. 'Oh, I'm no one. Except I don't think you run the planet any more.'

Donna thought Sebastiene was going to shoot, she really did. Here in the dark of this ruined base, she thought the Doctor was really about to die.

Instead, however, Sebastiene saw sense.

He had so many plans. There was so much to do. Planet 1 was his; had always been his. What was Planet 1 without Sebastiene? What was Sebastiene without Planet 1?

What was he?

'This had better be good,' he warned the Doctor.

'If you want my real advice, we should stop wasting time talking and get to the TARDIS. Is it in the Chateau?'

'Not yet.' Sebastiene had to keep his face from twitching. This was still the game. The Doctor Trap. 'Give me one good reason I should believe you.'

'You won't like it,' came the reply. The Doctor moved to help his friend. 'Do you mind, she is in pain.'

'I'll shoot her dead if you do anything I don't like,' Sebastiene warned. 'I am an excellent shot.'

The Doctor helped Donna to a broken chair. She was rubbing her wounded leg and looking daggers at

Sebastiene. Let her.

‘Come on then, Doctor,’ he said. ‘Where’s this evidence that’s going to blow my socks off?’

‘All right. The hunters were offered a new challenge.

Why bother chasing me and get whatever scraps you were offering? Why not try for a new trophy: Planet 1 itself?

Planet 1 is nothing without its ruler, its organising principle, its... heart. All the technology in the universe is no use without a creative mind to put it to good use.’

‘Are you here to warn me or compliment me?’

Sebastiene sniffed. He knew he was vain enough to be tickled by the Doctor’s words. ‘Yes,’ he said, ‘my genius is vital to the legend.’

‘How old are you, Sebastiene?’ asked the Doctor.

‘When was the last time you did anything because you needed to, instead of because you couldn’t think of anything better?’

‘Here we go...’ Sebastiene yawned. ‘The moral.’

‘Donna says you told her you’re from Earth.’

‘Possibly,’ he replied.

‘You did,’ she said.

‘What does it matter?’ Sebastiene didn’t like these questions. ‘More games, more fudges. Get on with it.’

‘It matters to you, I think,’ said the Doctor. ‘Because I

think you're a robot.'

Sebastiene nearly shot him there and then. Not because he couldn't believe the Doctor but because he could.

'I'm me,' he insisted. 'I'm Sebastiene.'

'No,' said the Doctor. 'You're a robot who thinks he's Sebastiene.'

Outside, thunder rumbled. Oh very good, very gothic, thought Sebastiene. The planet reflects my inner emotions.

'You're lying,' he said.

'Am I?' the Doctor replied. 'How do you know? Why can't it be true? You're always looking for the meaning behind the meaning; the real story. After all, you thought I was Baris. You couldn't tell us apart...'

'No one could!' Sebastiene heard himself shriek.

'Your Butler could. So could the Supervisor. But you couldn't. Your programming wouldn't let you.'

Sebastiene felt something like water rising in his head and blurring his brain. Fear. Genuine unadulterated fear. It couldn't be true. It just couldn't.

'I'm flesh and blood, you idiot,' he told the Doctor.

'I'm organic.'

'No. You're just a very, very expertly constructed... er... construct. You believe you are real because Planet 1 programs you to believe you're real. How else do you

think you survived Weimark's bullet? Nano-technology in your bloodstream? Come on...'

Sebastiene needed to get out of this dingy place; he needed fresh air and someone to hit. How could he convince them? When everything he said could be put down to programming?

'Let's face it, Sebastiene. If Planet 1 is best at anything, it's best at building brilliant robots really quickly. There are robot workshops all over the place. There's probably loads of replacement Sebastienes in storage who all believe they're the real thing. Save a fortune on bus fares.'

Sebastiene raised the bracelet again. 'Comms terminal!' he yelled. 'Now!'

The table in the centre of the room split and fell as the ground lifted. A surprised Donna was raised upwards and tipped out of her chair. 'Awww!' she bawled, falling into a pile of wrecked, and sharp, lab equipment. 'Why is it always me?'

Lights flickered and a hologram shuddered into life.

The Butler's head appeared in transparent colour. 'My master?' it asked.

'Immediate restructure in the Snowcap Zone. Get an atmosphere craft here; I want to come home. It's cold and I'm fed up.'

The Butler just stared. The holograph flickered.

‘Well?’ Sebastiene demanded.

The Butler smiled. A really cheery smile. ‘I don’t think I want to do what you tell me today, Sebastiene.’

Malfunction. Had to be. It had happened before. The technology was brilliant but not perfect.

‘What?’ Sebastiene asked coldly. ‘How dare you.’

‘Get lost,’ the Butler replied. ‘Or better still, stay there. I’ll send someone to warm you up.’

The holograph went dead.

‘Oh dear,’ said Donna, not bothering to conceal the smile.

Sebastiene fired a bullet into the machine. He felt anger overwhelm the fear. ‘What’s going on here? Am I master or aren’t I?’

He swung round, arms outstretched, daring the planet to respond.

‘Not any more, it seems,’ said the Doctor. ‘And the answer to the question of how a door in a hotel can open onto an Antarctic snow scene is that it’s a transmat portal and Planet 1 put it there for me.’

Sebastiene didn’t want to believe. But he did believe.

The Doctor looked almost sorry. ‘You see, I don’t think you rule very much any more.’ He rolled his hands into a

pretend megaphone. ‘Come in, Sebastiene, your time is up.’

Donna gasped. ‘I get it! I get the whole thing. The Doctor Trap. The safari. The planet wants you to take over.’ Sebastiene barely heard her.

‘Yes,’ said the Doctor. ‘I think it does. I guess I’m next in line. Fresh blood. Sorry,’ he winced at Sebastiene. ‘I think your planet’s bored of you.’

Donna almost felt sorry for him. Almost. Sebastiene looked around. His full bottom lip quivered, with anger or grief she couldn’t tell.

‘How dare you...’ he whispered.

‘We should escape,’ said Donna.

‘How dare you!’ Sebastiene screamed. He worked his way systematically round the lab, wrecking the wreckage. He went absolutely mad. ‘I rule here! Me! I’m in charge, I’ve always been in charge!’ He turned to Donna, who winced. The rage in those eyes defied sanity. Although he spoke to her, she realised he wasn’t even seeing her. ‘I am Planet 1,’ he snarled. ‘Planet 1 is me. I’ll destroy it before I give it up. I’ll tear this world apart with my bare hands if I have to.’

Donna felt a thump overhead and the base shook

‘Missiles, I imagine,’ said the Doctor. ‘The Butler

having some fun. I bet they're blowing the upper levels, sealing us down here, ready to send in the cavalry. 'He clapped his hands. 'Escape; now that's a great idea.' 'How?' Donna managed to stand. She pointed to the staring Sebastiene; who appeared to have fallen into some kind of trance.

'There's only one way out for all of us, Sebastiene,' said the Doctor. 'The TARDIS. Only I don't know where you've put it.'

Sebastiene said nothing. The turmoil in his head was taking his whole concentration. He muttered to himself.

'You're mine... you don't tire of me; oh no...'

The base shook again. Dust fell from the ceiling.

'The robots think the TARDIS is in the conference room,' said the Doctor. 'But it's not, is it? You're Sebastiene. You wouldn't just leave her lying around like that.'

Sebastiene ignored him.

The Doctor pulled him round. 'Listen to me. You can have your revenge, but we have to get away. Now tell me you didn't leave the TARDIS in the Chateau, did you?'

'Chateau, yes. Must get there... take... take the IMT...'

'Sebastiene! Where is the TARDIS?'

'It's here,' Sebastiene replied. 'Where you materialised;

covered by a cloaking device. It's out there in the snow.'

The Doctor squeezed his hand. 'Good old Sebastiene. I knew we could rely on you to be as sneaky and underhand as humanly – or robotically – possible.'

'Hang on,' said Donna. 'Won't Planet 1 just move it somewhere else?'

'If I'm right, Planet 1 can't move it because Sebastiene will have put one of his little impenetrable security things round it. Our man here would have to unlock it in person, like the prison zone. I guess. Or rather, I hope.'

Sebastiene was muttering. 'Yes, take the TARDIS.

Regroup, plan the counter-attack. The Chateau is the key... we get to the Chateau, overrides...'

'Sebastiene,' said the Doctor. 'We need to leave now. If we stay, we're finished. You must know another exit. Something the robots don't know about.'

'He can't hear us,' said Donna. 'He's gone.'



The Butler was enjoying itself. It found the new emotion exhilarating. Just for fun, the robot dialled the holograph in the base lab again but someone, presumably Sebastiene, had broken the projector.

The Butler was skull-docked in the control room watching three robot armies close in on the Snowcap Zone. Orders had been given to restore IMT functions and in six hours the atmospheric blocking crystals would be flushed out. The transmat would be up and running within a day, and Planet 1 would soon be back to normal. Sebastiene? Well, Sebastiene would be gone.

The Butler closed down the strategy screen and was about to remove the skull-dock when, on impulse, it double-checked the conference room. The captured TARDIS was still within, where it had remained since the day the Doctor arrived. Its presence reassured the robot. Even if he should escape the armies, the Doctor had to return to the Chateau. Hopefully he would bring Sebastiene with him.

The Butler was looking forward to the brave new world the Doctor would help them build. Away with all the decadence and frippery and selfishness of old. The Butler loved the idea that, with the Doctor being who he was, Planet 1 might become a good planet, a planet that helped, even a selfless planet. Be nice to do something positive for a change.

The robot looked round for reassurance. The control room was bustling normally. The Butler undocked. Soon they could get rid of all these messy consoles and go back to air-screens. After a while, it realised, they could get rid of a physical control room completely. An energy web hummed in the centre of the room. Baris floated inside; watching.

‘You’ve got the wrong man,’ he said again. ‘I’m the Doctor; release me.’

‘Now, now, Baris,’ said the Butler. ‘There’s a good boy.’

‘You don’t understand: this is all part of my plan. I’m giving you one more chance. Release me or suffer the consequences. That one at Snowcap, that’s Baris. You missed a switch; you all did.’

The Butler froze. What if Baris was right? What if this was just another facet of this incredibly complicated Doctor Trap? That would mean everything the robot did was contributing to its own downfall. The whole of Planet 1 could...

The Butler chuckled. ‘Well, you’re certainly as annoying as the real Doctor but... no. Not any more.’

Atmosphere craft landed on the snow. Hundreds of them. They surrounded Snowcap Base. Before the engines even cooled, the doors were open and security robots were pouring out through clouds of frozen moisture. Thermal imaging units were activated. If the humans were inside, the robots would find them. Smoke drifted up from the base chimneys: gas dropped down the pipes to stun any organic life forms below.

Luckily, the Doctor and Donna and Sebastiene were no longer below.

After a decent interval, the Doctor blew out the snow

that had fallen into his mouth and sat up. He had covered himself in a drift to observe the landings. The atmosphere craft looked like sycamore seeds spinning in the distance. Occasionally, a squadron flew overhead, but where they weren't looking, they wouldn't find.

He brushed a dewy icicle from the end of his nose and trudged back to the concealed Snow-Cat. They had spent a good hour of back-breaking labour covering the vehicle after the Doctor had dropped it into a crevasse. The thing was wedged in tight.

The Doctor jumped down onto the roof and kicked away the snow. 'How we all doing?'

Donna was moaning, of course. He hauled her out of the tiny gap in the door.

'Although the camouflage idea was a winner in theory,' she said in a prissy voice, 'we ain't never going to be able to drive this thing again. How do you even know where the TARDIS is?'

'Because I'm really good at remembering where I left the TARDIS. Even if it is invisible.'

Sebastiene climbed up onto the roof. He looked at the plumes of smoke that marked the base. 'Won't take them long to realise we're not there. They will have expected us to get out.'

‘You seem to be feeling a lot better,’ said Donna.

She changed her mind when he smiled at her. He was calm for now, but there was extreme violence in Sebastiene, ready to emerge.

The Doctor clapped his hands. ‘No worries. This is the exact spot where the TARDIS landed.’

‘How do you know?’ Sebastiene asked. ‘Have you got some sort of symbiotic telepathic link?’

‘Naah,’ he replied. ‘There’s a big square hole in the ground. Look.’

They did. There was.

‘OK, Seb,’ the Doctor continued. ‘Just operate the security diddly and in we go.’

Sebastiene twisted his bracelet and the air shimmered.

The familiar blue police box materialised in the snow.

The Doctor produced a key. ‘Won’t be a mo.’ He unlocked the door and went inside.

Donna looked Sebastiene up and down. ‘What are you going to do?’ she asked. ‘Now you’re a robot and everything.’

Sebastiene smiled his chilling smile again. He seemed to have regained some of his old, cruel humour. ‘Some redecorating at the Chateau. Revenge...’

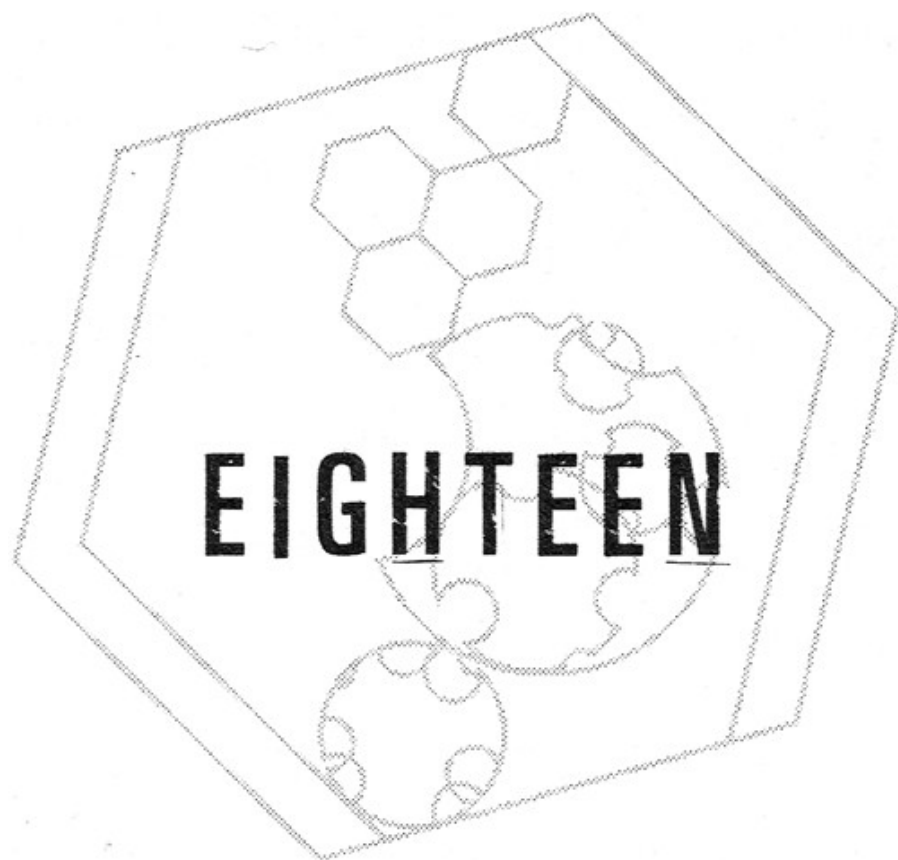
‘Oh that...’

‘I am going to disconnect my Butler. Very, very slowly...’

‘Oh, you...’ came a shout from the TARDIS.

The Doctor marched out. He looked accusingly at Sebastiene. He held the door open so he and Donna could see the four wooden walls and the tiny, empty space within. ‘You’ve been sussed, me old son,’ he said. ‘That’s just a blue box.’

There was a scream from the sky and they looked up to see atmosphere craft already approaching.



The robot army reported in. They had found and

captured the fugitives. All three.

IMT was twelve minutes and forty-eight seconds to full operation. Beneath the planet's surface, huge generators were powering up. All was well with Planet 1.

There were big plans for the Doctor. The Butler was on a schedule.

The Doctor, Donna and Sebastiene were being ferried by atmosphere craft to the Chateau. The Butler went to meet them personally. He snarled at the pompous horse-drawn carriage as it drew up in the courtyard. Another confection soon to be dismantled. The Butler was looking forward to meeting his old master again.

First, the Doctor had to become the planet. The Butler's programming was far too limited to comprehend what that meant, or how it could be achieved, but it knew this first step was vital. And the Doctor was tricky and more than likely to resist.

A fleet of atmosphere craft flew through the force shields. One broke off from the formation and dropped onto the highly decorated tarmac of the landing site.

The horses pulled up and the Butler exited the carriage. Doors opened on the steaming atmosphere craft.

Eighteen armed security robots escorted the Doctor, Sebastiene and Donna out.

The prisoners were downcast, not talking, eyes rooted on the floor. Only the Doctor showed signs of life, looking around without emotion.

Searching for a way out, thought the Butler. Oh, he was a clever one.

‘Into the carriage please,’ it sang. ‘Nearly there.’

It was just about to taunt the depressed-looking Sebastiene when a command sparked inside the Butler’s brain. Planet 1 was informing the robot that IMT was back on-line. ‘We have Molecular Technology again...’ The robot sighed. What a relief.

The entourage immediately stopped moving. No need for them any more.

The Butler snapped his fingers and a security field materialised around the three prisoners. They looked about in surprise.

Raising an air-screen, the Butler organised immediate transmat to the control room. The robot took one last look at the horse and carriage and smiled. That was the last time it was going to have to put up with this kind of nonsense.

They travelled.

‘Donna Noble is a useful tool,’ said the Butler. ‘She ensures compliance. I’m sure I’m not the first to say it.’

Donna and Sebastiene were secure enough. They dangled in fizzing energy bonds next to Baris. The Doctor was standing in hand and wrist molecular restraints.

Planet 1 needed him mobile. All around the control room, operator robots were busy with air-screens. The old VR equipment had been junked, and not before time.

The Butler waved a giant hand and the control room floor opened up. A vast hum rang out from fathomless depths. Far below, unearthly purple light – pure living, breathing energy – danced and swam across chasms of unimaginably advanced technology. Snake-like cables the size of tower blocks erupted upwards. They writhed in and out of each other, eager to get their hands on the last of the Time Lords.

‘The heart of Planet 1,’ said the Butler. ‘Ready for you, Doctor. You and Planet 1; together for ever.’ The robot chuckled. ‘At last: no more errors; no more decadence, just purpose.’

The Doctor did not react.

‘Why so glum?’ The Butler was in a chatty mood.

‘You’re about to become a god!’

The Doctor said nothing.

‘All the experience, imagination and wonder locked up inside you will keep Planet 1 occupied for millennia.

We're all very excited. Who knows, perhaps eventually we will find a way of moving through the universe together. Imagine that? Planet 1, mobile. We might even learn to create a new universe, whole dimensions, just for us.'

The giant cables writhed in anticipation, like restless fingers. Sebastiene wriggled in his bubble. 'Traitor,' he said tonelessly.

The Doctor looked sad. 'All that energy, all those resources, and you don't know what to do with yourselves.'

The Butler pulled up an air-screen. 'Excuse me,' he said. 'Before you start trying to talk me out of this, I need to perform a bio-check. So we know you are who you say you are. You remember.'

Molecular scanning lights flashed up and down the Doctor's floating body. Operator robots read information. 'Jolly good,' the Butler said. 'Now. This will take only a few seconds. And then we'll have you.' The giant cables reared and pounced.

An alarm sounded. The Butler froze. The cables retreated. Operator robots looked up in horror.

'I'm not the Doctor,' said the Doctor. 'I'm a robot bomb. And you've just armed me.' He jumped into the

chasm.

The Butler and the rest of the operator robots looked up to see another Doctor and Sebastiene attaching a device to Baris's floating body. All three disappeared.

There came a great mechanical roar of pain and anger and fear from the depths of Planet 1.

The Sebastiene and Donna robots smiled. Sebastiene gave the Butler a little wave. And went off.

The Doctor, Sebastiene and Baris shimmered and dropped onto the snow.

The air shimmered again, and Donna appeared. Along with a familiar blue box. Donna gave the Doctor a thumbs-up.

'Intelligent Molecular Technology,' said the Doctor brightly. 'What a marvellous concept.'

Somehow, this made them all giggle. They couldn't help themselves. For a good minute, all they did was choke. Not the most obvious sign of a good time but a good time nevertheless.

'With the amount of explosive in those robots, we've obliterated half the northern hemisphere,' said Sebastiene. He looked pleased with his statement.

'Does that mean Planet 1 is dead?' asked Donna.

The Doctor inspected the TARDIS. 'Oh I doubt that.

We gave it a little sting; a headache. Enough of a distraction to get away.'

He looked at a small opening in the frozen ground.

Down below, large blocks of grey machinery throbbed and clunked. Pipes hissed with releasing steam as the robot shaping devices cooled. Automatic cables detached and went dormant.

'I don't get it. What the hell just happened?' asked Baris.

'Like I told Donna,' said the Doctor, 'you're never more than a kilometre away from a robot workshop. Even Planet 1 can't think of everything.'

'The Doctor Trap,' said Donna. She pulled her parka tight around herself. 'Can we go?'

'Eh?'

Sebastiene was suddenly gloomy. He seemed disappointed. 'Without someone to organise its systems, Planet 1 is nothing but a lifeless machine. Once I was kicked out, there was no creative mind behind its reasoning. Until it could claim the Doctor, Planet 1 had to think for itself. And we out-thought it.'

'Sebastiene knew there was a robot factory here, so we went underground and built some robots...' said Donna.

'Disguised them as us and gave them up to Planet 1. To

blow up the Chateau,’ continued the Doctor. ‘We gambled that Planet 1 would instinctively want full power and rush to get the IMT back up and running. Once it did that, we were able to transmat in and rescue you and the TARDIS.’ Sebastiene sneered. ‘Dumb. Very dumb. If Planet 1 had trusted me more, we would never have succeeded.’

‘A machine is a machine...’ The Doctor patted the TARDIS. ‘No offence.’

They stood in the snow and looked at each other. The Doctor, Donna, Sebastiene, Baris.

The blizzard, artificially generated though it may have been, howled round them. The distant sun was setting.

‘Well,’ said Donna, ‘nice meeting you.’

They stayed looking.

‘You know I’m coming with you,’ said Sebastiene.

‘No,’ the Doctor replied. ‘Baris, but not you...’

Baris was rubbing his arms. The end of his nose was dripping ice; otherwise he still looked like the Doctor.

‘You can’t just leave him,’ he said. ‘Once Planet 1 is recovered it’s going to come hunting.’

‘Good,’ said Donna.

Sebastiene smiled at the Doctor. ‘You misunderstand.’

He opened his coat and produced a short, gleaming sword.

‘Rustled it up in the lab when you were fussing over the

robots. Thought it might come in handy. And, yes, I am an expert.'

The Doctor laughed. 'You misunderstand me, Sebastiene. When I say not you, I don't mean I won't take you. I mean I can't.'

Sebastiene twitched. 'No more games.'

'You're a construct. A product of Planet 1. You can't leave; you physically can't. Whoever you once were, now you are joined to Planet 1. It's what feeds you; what powers you. It's the price you pay for all your gadgets and long life and indestructibility.'

Donna began to back-pedal. She felt for the reassuring door of the TARDIS. 'That's all settled, then,' she said.

'Personally, I'd leave you here anyway.'

Sebastiene flashed the sword up. Its tip hovered a centimetre in front of the Doctor's nose. 'You're lying,' he said. The doubt in his voice was clear. 'I'm not a robot. I'm not!' He recovered himself. 'Anyway, there's no harm in trying. Move.'

Something was breathing on Donna's neck. Something that smelled like overripe fruit. Dusty cloth tickled her hair. She saw Baris react in shock at whatever was crawling down the TARDIS behind her.

'Doctor...' he said. 'Doctor!'

They looked at Donna and gasped. She felt talons clasp her shoulder and the sticky breath waft over her cheek. ‘The Carpalian Witch,’ said Sebastiene, a vibrant smile returning to his face. ‘Oh, very good.’

Donna glanced sideways to see a grotesque jaw stretching out from beneath a black hood. The jaw contained what appeared to be a cross between an insect’s mandibles and human teeth. A voice like dry twigs spoke in Donna’s ear. ‘Did you really think to end the hunt so easily?’

Claws clasped Donna’s face. ‘Give yourself to me or the girl dies.’

Donna waited for the Doctor to say something. He didn’t.

‘Doctor...’ she reminded him. ‘A little rescuing here, please.’

Instead, he folded his arms and regarded the pair of them as if they were an interesting puzzle to be solved.

‘The real question is,’ he said, ‘who are you after? The Doctor? In which case there’s a choice of two. Sebastiene? Bit difficult to know which one of us is supposed to give ourselves up? Strangely enough, the only one you definitely don’t want is Donna.’

Donna tried to stay calm. ‘Doctor, stop talking and do

something.'

'I'm the Doctor,' said Baris. 'Here...'

He took a step forward. The real Doctor held him back.

'No he isn't. Listen, you're between me and my TARDIS and that won't do. If you want Sebastiene, you go get him; otherwise, we're going to have words, and I'll finish you like I finished the rest of your stupid Society. So make up your mind and act like you mean it.'

That did the trick. There was a pause as the Carpalian Witch drew in an insulted breath, bellowed an insect screech, then launched its black-hooded body at the group. Specifically: at Sebastiene. He whooped for joy and brandished his newly forged sword. The Doctor and Baris stumbled backwards as the creature pounced.

Sebastiene stood his ground. He slashed at the Carpalian Witch, who howled and fell. A thickly furred limb lay thrashing in the snow.

'It's not dead!' Baris yelled as the Witch leaped up again. Claws extended, mandibles spitting, it launched itself at Sebastiene. He dodged as its talons raked his chest. Beating the creature back, he looked at the blood spilling down his tailored black coat. 'I-I'm hurt...' he whispered in disbelief. 'Why you...!'

He took a step backwards, ready to launch a full-on

attack, and fell through the hole into the robotics workshop. The Carpalian Witch squatted then sprang down after him.

‘Run, Sebastiene!’ the Doctor yelled. ‘Run!’

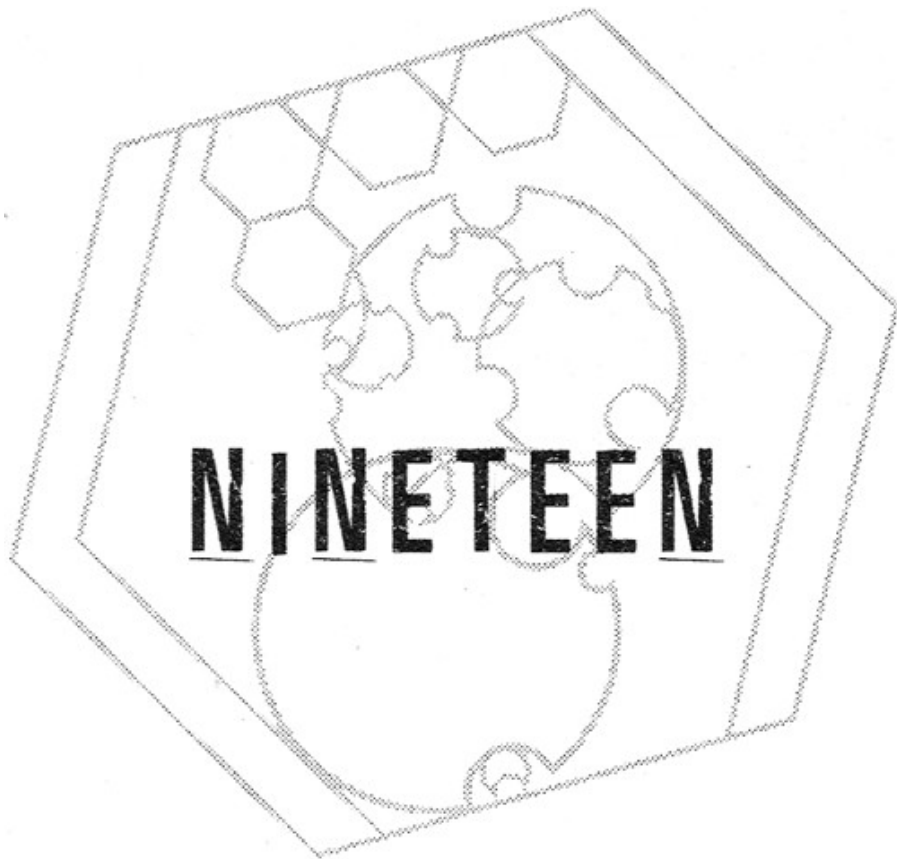
He made to follow, but Baris held him back. ‘I’ll go,’ he said. ‘You’ve done enough. You need to get away from Planet 1. Now.’

The Doctor pushed him aside. ‘After everything he’s done, even if he escapes the Witch, every part of this whole planet is going to be after him. I have to try...’

With a surprising, new-found strength, Baris shoved him over. The Doctor fell onto a bed of snow.

‘I’m the Doctor today, mush,’ said Baris. ‘Look, I do owe him. He made me the man you are today. So in a way, you will be trying.’ He looked down at the hole and yelled. ‘The Doctor to the rescue!’

And he jumped.



The TARDIS was lovely and warm. Really, really lovely and warm. Donna was never going to leave it again; not until she knew for absolutely definite that the sunshine level outside was nothing less than Tenerife.

The Doctor was brooding over the console. He wasn't his usual self.

Donna stopped there and told herself off. Don't talk about 'usual selves'. We've had enough trouble as it is.

'Sebastiene?' she asked instead.

The Doctor shrugged.

'You liked him, didn't you? A little bit? Eensy-teensy?'

He seemed to be talking to himself. ‘Oh, he’ll probably be all right. Deep down, he’s a resourceful bloke. Even without the toys. Probably end up running Planet 1 again. Especially with Baris looking after him.’

‘He couldn’t leave the planet, you said so yourself. So don’t worry about it.’

The Doctor looked up, as if suddenly remembering she was there. ‘What do you mean?’

‘He was a robot, wasn’t he? You said he was reliant on Planet 1. You couldn’t take him even if you wanted to.’

The Doctor gave her a look. A look that told her she should know better. ‘Donna...’

She stopped. ‘You mean... he wasn’t? You mean... You lied?’

He didn’t react. Not in any way whatsoever.

Donna held a hand over her mouth. She began to giggle. ‘Oh my God. You know what, if he ever susses, he’s going to be really annoyed with you.’

The Doctor began to play with the TARDIS controls. A new energy coursed through him. ‘Too complicated!’ he announced. ‘I’m done with complicated. I want explosions and spectacle and chases again.’ He looked up at her, smoothed his wild hair back and gave her his widest grin. ‘Let’s do something simple.’

‘Warm,’ said Donna. ‘That’s all I want. Warm.’

‘All right. Warm.’ And with a laugh, he yanked the lever.

You will be told this: Planet 1 is real.

And you never know; perhaps one day the invitation will be for you.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to: Justin for remembering me. Mark and Mark: good luck!
Gary

for a great day out. Caz, of course.

Also, the next generation: Nina, Matthew and Polly Body, Emily,
Lauren

and Sam next door.